

place e. he. (C) rain grows well here. And good wine
a. or it is gooder than you take it is. Rain fall finely
s. fresh and heavy on the lo. g. is y. pas u. of. the g.
n. ou. at. n. a. heavily forested with fine timber and the
. What is well. man. of. in. (use. to. T. 05."
1. Myse's heart leaped up at the words of the regis-t

NINE LIVES



NINE LIVES

Marwa Arsanios

Raven Chacon

Bethany Collins

Tamar Guimarães

Kapwani Kiwanga

Hương Ngô

Aliza Nisenbaum

Alison O'Daniel

Toyin Ojih Odutola

Elle Pérez

Charlotte Prodger

+

Kayhan Irani

Maisie Mattia

Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi

The Renaissance Society
at the University of Chicago

CONTENTS

6	Introduction	
7-29	<i>Installation Views</i>	
8	<i>Stories of One Life and Many</i>	Karsten Lund and Caroline Picard
20	<i>It is what it is</i>	Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi
30	<i>On asking questions</i>	Karsten Lund and Caroline Picard
32-82	<i>Artworks and Details</i>	
32	Toyin Ojih Odutola	on alternative realities
34	Bethany Collins	on reshaping a story
36	Raven Chacon	on listening intently
39	Aliza Nisenbaum	on private spheres
40	Kayhan Irani	on the center of narratives
41	Maisie Mattia	from <i>The Fifth Mouth</i> , 2020 <i>paired with a photograph by Elle Pérez</i>
43	Huong Ngô	on embodying translation
47	Kapwani Kiwanga	on reimagining documents
51	Maisie Mattia	from <i>Estrogen</i> , 2018 <i>paired with a photograph by Elle Pérez</i>
53	Alison O’Daniel	on rewriting history
59	Maisie Mattia	from <i>Petals</i> , 2015 <i>paired with a photograph by Elle Pérez</i>
62	Charlotte Prodger	on names (from <i>BRIDGIT</i> , 2016)
66	Marwa Arsanios	on political representations
70	Tamar Guimarães	on passages in time
74	Works in the Exhibition	
76	Biographies	
80	Colophon	



INTRODUCTION

Nine Lives takes shape around a diverse set of protagonists, as if this exhibition were a collection of short stories or personal essays told from different points of view. These figures—whether real or imagined—come forward in the artworks, which offer intimate but imperfect access to their respective lives. Each work holds the residual impression of a moment, a journey, an effort, or a thought, with varying degrees of legibility. As these individuals quietly occupy everyday settings or navigate more extraordinary circumstances, larger dimensions also begin to emerge. While a notion of the self remains central to the exhibition, this self always moves in relation to society and history, with an ongoing tension between public and private experience.

Motifs of reading, writing, and translating appear throughout the exhibition. These take familiar forms, such as books, newspapers, and documents from archives, but the artists are also thinking about these kinds of activities in more expansive ways: how textiles can also be texts, for example, or how a musical score is waiting to be enacted. In bringing the work of eleven artists together, *Nine Lives* is weighing how stories are told, where they can be found, and what their effects might be, both on a collective scale and within individual lives. Not all stories are told in the present tense and many follow us from the past, infusing daily life, as they are carried on through language and held in our bodies. As such, some of the artists in *Nine Lives*, or their protagonists, also consider how traces of the past are interpreted or understood; their work is developing new appraisals of history, as it is felt here and now, and how history can be re-examined or rewritten.

This exhibition is part of the Feminist Art Coalition, an expansive platform for projects inspired by feminist thought, experience, and action that will unfold at dozens of museums around the country beginning in the fall of 2020. Informed by this backdrop, *Nine Lives* echoes various feminist legacies, especially artists and filmmakers who have explored what it is for women to tell their own stories or to make space for narratives otherwise obstructed or unwritten. As feminist dialogues continue to evolve, *Nine Lives* embraces how these efforts have expanded to include greater multiplicities, geographies, and gender identities.

—Karsten Lund and Caroline Picard, co-curators

SEP 12-NOV 15, 2020

NINE LIVES

MARWA ARSANIOS
RAVEN CHACON
BETHANY COLLINS
TAMAR GUIMARÃES
KAPWANI KIWANGA
HUONG NGÔ
ALIZA NISENBAUM
ALISON ODANEL
TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA
ELLE PEREZ
CHARLOTTE PRODGER



STORIES OF ONE LIFE AND MANY

Karsten Lund and
Caroline Picard

Some group exhibitions begin with a deceptively simple premise: not a theme or a subject, but a starting point. This show is like that. It began with the idea of gathering a group of protagonists, a set of individuals who come forward in various ways, whether through first person accounts or because they were observed by someone else. We imagined each artwork in the show could reflect upon a person at the center of their own story. But who are these protagonists? And who seems to be writing their narrative: the person herself, or the artist, or somebody on the outside, like you?

Otessa Moshfegh's novel *Death in Her Hands* begins with the protagonist finding a note on a walk in the woods with her dog: "Her name was Magda," the note says. "Nobody will ever know who killed her. It wasn't me. Here is her dead body."¹ The note doesn't accompany a dead body but like a body, it points to the absence of a life, a very specific life, a life whose consideration drives the rest of the novel. *Nine Lives* is a group exhibition that collects the residual impressions of individual protagonists: real or imagined, one protagonist per artwork, or that's what we had in mind. Like the conceit of Moshfegh's novel, the exhibition's premise unraveled in unexpected, yet welcome, ways. Different considerations were drawn into the orbit of the show as it came together, weaving new patterns into ensemble.

As is often the case, the initial premise becomes more complex as the artists respond on their own terms. All of the artists subtly refract the terms of our initial invitation; within their work, each establishes their own center of gravity and unique interpretive framework. Or they share these decisions with a collaborator (say, as they produce a tapestry), or with the person whom they depict (in a photograph or a video or a painting)–

In the photographs and paintings here, individuals appear lost in thought or return the gaze of the camera. There are cinematic scenes that reanimate historic figures, from distant Neolithic deities to more

1 Otessa Moshfegh, *Death in Her Hands* (New York: Penguin Press, 2020), 1.





recent revolutionaries and characters from literature. A flag invites the audience to sing the celebratory anthem of a woman from history. Drawings challenge the authority of translation and a weaving honors unknown lives who, against inconceivable odds, concealed and traveled with the seeds of some possible future. Or we observe the private activities of a musician, organizing her studio and practicing.

The sound of a drum reverberates here, not to make a coherent song, necessarily, but articulating a form of presence. Sound periodically echoes through the gallery. A fleeting transmission, something that reverberates through memory and body alike. It is recorded, translated into signs, a score. An invitation to reply.

Other voices come forward in a surprising proliferation of printed matter. One artist prints a newspaper. Another artist traces the hand of a long-dead revolutionary using invisible ink. Elsewhere, typeset pages redrawn by hand and subsequently erased, their letters falling away into a disorienting, quiet sea. A writer appears in three photographic portraits while also offering three writings in a chapbook. As these text-based reflections found their way into the gallery space, we began to wonder about the connection between the life of an individual and the recording and transmission of her private thoughts.

To what extent can you talk about “a life” as if it came with its own clear boundaries? To what extent can you talk about a life as if it had a clear beginning and end?

A person’s life takes many forms during its own progression of years and decades. It also springs from the lives of others and is further shaped in response to its surroundings. We are touched by what came before, and we go on to touch the lives of others who might themselves live on for many more years after we have passed. (What will *this* time seem like in a decade? For all of its strange and frozen qualities, when so many are sheltering in place. Do you imagine each artwork is like a window into another person’s world?)

Sometimes exhibitions have a forensic quality. When examined, objects on view gather significance, making a single argument that the viewer pieces together, like a detective or an analyst. *Nine Lives* is different. There remains a sense of accumulated impressions—hints of meaning—but there is something unstable about any final summation.

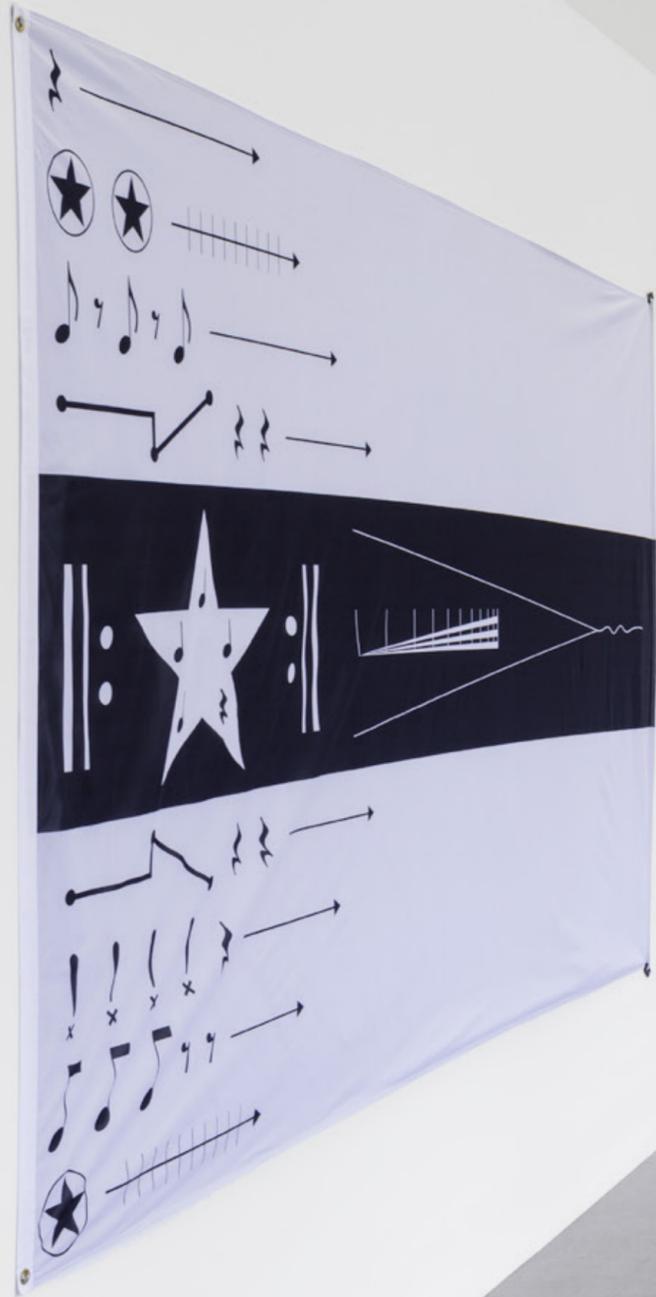
The artworks on view instead endure with persistent, subjective qualities. Rather than providing evidence for an argument or making a case, the exhibition’s qualities more closely evoke the sensation of being with people. In that respect, the viewer becomes another subject within this constellation of figures—another guest stopping by. To us, the show feels inherently polyvocal (this essay, too), presenting multiple faces, questions, and impressions that change upon reflection, over the course of the day with the light, just as a conversation changes in memory over time, remaining nevertheless saturated in feeling.

Or maybe *Nine Lives* is a bit like a dinner party filled with strong personalities where sympathies and affinities start to build and amplify. One anecdote inspires another: the difficulty of a day’s rehearsal, the new studio set up, and so on—*how was your day, by the way? Did you hear about so-and-so?* Even if the artworks reference one primary subject, they have a prismatic effect, introducing other subjects—other people, influences, considerations, timelines, and politics.

In other ways too, there is a hint of expansion or regeneration within the exhibition, even in its very structure. One life becomes many. The title *Nine Lives* suggests nine individual stories, perhaps, and at any given moment a visitor to the show will encounter nine artists’ work in the space. But there are eleven artists in the show, as if the exhibition were pushing against its own implicit boundaries, letting itself expand through time as much as in space. In a darkened room, designed for projected videos, three works play in cycling sequence, meaning that the composition of the exhibition shifts in a subtle way throughout the day.

Throughout all this, an ephemeral community takes shape, tenuously establishing itself. Like the artists, each protagonist that appears within a given artwork brings their own set of concerns or questions, their own outside influences, friends, memories, or ethical considerations. Layers begin to accumulate, yielding nuances that may not always be on the surface of the work so as much as deep within it, lived through by the person depicted at its center.

These nuances are inextricably and reciprocally linked to larger societies and histories, too, contexts within which the protagonists—like us—are nested. In an essay collection, Sky Hopinka writes:



“It’s important to see oneself reflected in the society we live in. More purposefully, it’s essential to see oneself reflected with potential and hope in the society we want to live in.”² Maybe seeing yourself in society is connected to making art, telling stories, locating yourself within a trajectory, learning stories about where you come from and where you might go.

Thinking about a group exhibition as a collection of short stories leads to other questions related to storytelling itself. What’s at stake in something as apparently simple as a story? What’s at stake in language itself?

Joan Didion wrote: “We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”³ This line opens the “The White Album,” a landmark essay she developed between 1968 and 1978, in which she sets out to make sense of the events of the tumultuous sixties and her own experiences during this time. The stories she alludes to are personal, but they also belong to and come from society. These stories, in both registers, seem unavoidable, feeding into each other and out again; they are also clearly inadequate. Didion’s essay is about an author in search of a narrative and the ultimate inability to find one that feels sufficient.

As this exhibition began taking shape, it was the artworks themselves that introduced questions around reading, writing, and translating, as well as transcribing, texting, tracing, singing, recording, reenacting, weaving, or transmitting. On a broader level, this same underlying current of storytelling—and all these related actions—filters perceptions of the world while informing our individual participation. Storytelling is an essential and often unconscious practice that gives each of us direction. It also knits communities together, both in the space of everyday life and historic awareness. A kind of weaving that implicates the teller and audience alike. Stories anticipate a future—like hidden grains of rice.

Various people appear in the works on view, but this question feels just as central: when does the author or artist become an implicit protagonist too (even as they settle their attention on somebody else)? Or when is there someone else quietly in the background, someone who is just as vital to the story as whomever is in front?

The translator, let’s say, the historian, the reader, the viewer.

In listening to one narrative, we discover the absence of others, bumping into countless other narratives that have been overlooked, or concealed. As Rebecca Solnit writes, “Some women get erased a little at a time, some all at once. Some reappear. Every woman who appears wrestles with the forces that would have her disappear. She struggles with the forces that would tell her story for her, or write her out of the story, the genealogy, the rights of man, the rule of law. The ability to tell your own story, in words or images, is already a victory, already a revolt.”⁴

The residue of erasure becomes another kind of text, words broken up on a page, they look almost like a sea upon which we peer, trying to decipher something. How to read, how to remember, impressions and incidents that don’t cohere? How to grasp those that slip away?

In the early stages of planning this exhibition, we thought about feminist films from the 1970s, like Kate Millett’s film *Three Lives* (1971), and Julia Reichert’s *Growing Up Female* (1971); both productions center on women speaking to the camera and telling the stories of their life. Films like these remind us that stories have power, and the nine people who appear as their own narrators in those films in turn suggest the existence of stories by many, many more people, too.

Not everyone gets to tell their own story. Sometimes others come by later to salvage and share what they can, or to set the record straight, or to make sense of what is missing. In *Zong!*, M. NourbeSe Philip writes, “In the discomfort and disturbance created by the poetic text, I am forced to make meaning from apparently disparate elements—in so doing I implicate myself. The risk—of contamination—lies in piecing together the story that cannot be told. And since we have to work to complete the events, we all become implicated in, if not contaminated by, this activity.”⁵ She refers to a specific legal text, the only surviving evidence that documents a court case in which 150 captive Africans were drowned on a slave ship for insurance money. *Zong!* takes the remaining public articles and, through a form of intervention in which no text is added, NourbeSe Philip brings forth the absence of those individuals massacred in 1871, showing how historic violence endures through the present, reverberating in public life, echoing in consciousness, troubling a sense of autonomy and self-determination.

Sometimes history is with us in ways we may not explicitly recognize.

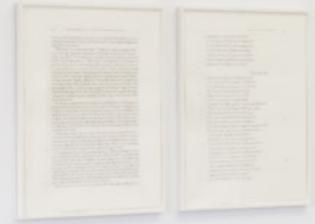
2 Sky Hopinka, *Around the Edge of Encircling the Lake* (Milwaukee: The Green Gallery Press, 2018), 77.

3 Joan Didion, “The White Album,” from *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2006), 179.

4 Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 78.

5 M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 198.





Resmaa Menakem writes, “We’ve been trained to think of the past in terms of a written historical record. But events don’t just get written down; they get recorded and passed on in human bodies.”⁶ What else can one learn from one’s own body, if you better learn how to “read it”? Can one exorcise history from the body? Can one imagine an alternate world without slavery and colonialism? The imagination has its own revolutionary capacity; once set loose, a picture forms, and from there a world can be built and embodied.

Some of the figures represented in this show—Ida B. Wells, for instance, or Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai, or Jamila Bouhired—specialized in a form of resistance, negotiating the constraints of the politics of their time. Much of their activity was documented, to differing degrees, or it found its force in newspapers in the case of Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching crusade; but in other ways such icons remain elusive figures, spectral in historical archives even as they loom large in the cultural imagination. Partly the function of history, partly the function of operating covertly in the cases of Minh Khai or Bouhired, the full extent of their impact is hard to measure. And yet you see how they have been metabolized, absorbed as icons of resistance, becoming images or ideas over time. Their “true” presence might be eclipsed by their story in popular mythology or mass media—as figures who, having become symbols, were assimilated to other people’s ends.

It seems vital to recognize the ambiguities involved, and the ambivalence that can arise in these efforts to try and understand the past. So too, it becomes a complicated task to think about how histories can be re-examined and the ways that they often need to be rewritten. As Isa, the protagonist in Tamar Guimarães film in the exhibition, observes, as she thinks about how to adapt an earlier satire of Brazilian society: “The temptation to rewrite passages is there, but why replace the mistakes of the past with the opinions of today that might be just as wrong? When one says ‘now,’ it is the observations and mistakes of another time speaking. The audience will see that time has both passed and not passed.”

“History” is happening all around us. We are part of it, but most of the time our experience is more ordinary, focused not on sweeping changes but on the smaller, more personal things. For that matter, so much of life remains undocumented, even for those at the heart of social movements and on the front lines of conflict and cultural change. Many small things occur in a day that matter, too. Too many

to keep track of. Moving objects, aspirations, desires, obstacles; thinking about objects, aspirations, desires, obstacles; negotiating those same objects, aspirations, desires, obstacles. In the midst of it, we encounter others—sometimes in harmony, sometimes at odds with our own purpose—as we collectively endure and make our way through the various architectures (physical, political, psychological) that others left behind. Works in this show also capture individuals at home, reading the news, looking off into space—gentle reminders that interiors and interiorities, may be no less political.

“There is an inescapable correspondence between the architecture of a place and the character of the community that has settled there,” writes Marwa All-Sabouni. “Our architecture tells the story of who we are. The people who construct and use a building are therefore not the only contributors to it; those who may never enter it and those who simply pass it by may equally contribute to its formation, because they are part of the social reality that led to its creation.”⁷ Perhaps we inherit history, like buildings and stories. But where is the self within that? Who am I?

The word “everyday” includes an implicit 24-hour span of time and also a sense of eternal progression—a forever, perhaps, divided up into familiar units. In contrast, to talk about history is to pull back the frame of view: it feels more sweeping, seen from a distance and drawing in many more people. In this way, history can feel much more abstract, in contrast to the concreteness of everyday life. And yet these two ideas (history and the everyday) aren’t disconnected. History encompasses millions or billions of everyday lives. And a single person’s life can sway the course of history—or that’s what we’re taught in school as we learn about presidents, generals, intellectuals, and scientists, or resistance figures in struggles for freedom or civil rights. In the end, there is a continual movement between these different registers, between these different levels.

History extends like a sea behind us, before us. We nevertheless, intuitively or otherwise, attempt to locate ourselves within that complex extension. Negotiating identity, its shifting projections, a practice generally reserved for human encounters, until we see the ways in which the very names of things—ancient mounds, for instance—are similarly malleable, their names change between centuries and languages, even if the forms themselves remain. What is constant about the self as it transforms and moves through time?

6 Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmothers’ Hands* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 72.

7 Marwa All-Sabouni, *The Battle for Home: Memoir of a Syrian Architect* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 26.





IT IS WHAT IT IS

Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi

Khorshid, whose name translates in English to Sun, arrived from Canada on a dreary February morning. We had been warned that she wouldn't answer to Sun because her family only ever spoke to her in Farsi, telling her softly, Khorshid *bia* and Khorshid *nakon* and Khorshid *bia bebin chi vasat kharidam*, her favorite of the three commands because it meant a treat had been purchased for her, a sliver of fish or a thread from which lush multi-colored feathers had been strung for her pleasure. Her fate, which had been mostly favorable, had taken a horrifying turn. She had lost her family, a set of parents and their twin children, on the eve of January 8th, 2020, in an explosion at dusk over the Tehran sky. The family was returning to Canada via Kiev after a brief visit to their homeland to attend a wedding. The pilots had barely drawn the plane's wheels into the wheel well when it was shot down by two surface-to-air missiles twenty-three seconds apart. As the plane dribbled down the sky, it appeared to the innocent gaze of bystanders to be the descending sun ablaze, emitting one last concentrated sigh before the curtains of night were drawn.

On the morning of the accident, Khorshid had sat expectantly at the living room window. She had sensed that her family was due to return *any minute now* and her eyes, fixed on the wide concrete path on either side of which shoveled snow had been piled high, betrayed an expression of longing. At least that's what the pet sitter who'd been minding Khorshid had initially thought. When we spoke over the phone, after I'd agreed to adopt her, he described to me in detail the view from the window where Khorshid had conducted what had appeared at first to be a ritual act of devotion to her humans, that generous and noble waiting at the windows. He repeated several times, in a panicked voice, that that's what he'd thought was happening: that the cat was yearning for the familiar scents of her beloveds, that she was anticipating the hour of their approach. But then, as news of the explosion surfaced on all of his life's screens—the multiple televisions affixed to the walls of the family's home, the Twitter feed on his iPhone, and then again on the YouTube channel he'd opened his laptop to—he'd begun to feel that he was engulfed in invisible flames. Uncertain about what to do to find relief, he'd ran outside into the cold where he'd suddenly snapped back to attention. That's when he saw that the cat's eyes bore an expression of horror and disgust not unlike his own. A strange feeling had come over him then, an inability

to recognize the world and for a moment, which had seemed to him to last an eternity, he felt unable tell himself apart from the cat. He had seen in her distressed face his own. Khorshid's pupils, he told me, were dilated, static. Her brow was locked in anger. Her mouth was turned down in grave lament, and as he looked at her, he had the strange sensation that his own mouth was sliding off his face.

To this the sitter added that in the proceeding days he had not known how to speak of the disaster to poor Khorshid, who had begun to lick her sides raw in response to her family's sudden collective death on the other side of the Atlantic. He had failed, he said, at soothing her. *She must have sensed the end approaching*, the sitter said breathlessly into the phone. I told him it was entirely possible, and then I closed my eyes and saw the concrete path Khorshid had studied through the windows. I don't remember what the sitter said next, but in my mind's eye that concrete suburban path, cracked from the cold and exposed to the elements, suddenly morphed. It became elongated, as though it were made of rubber, and took the shape of the lit runway at Imam Khomeini airport from which the Ukrainian passenger plane delayed by fifty-seven minutes had taken off—the same runway from which I'd fled decades earlier—and my whole body shuddered.

"Are you still there?" The sitter said.

I confirmed that I was. I told him not to worry, that I would adopt Khorshid and give her the best Iranian life ever. I said this so emphatically that he was taken aback. I filled the silence when I should have kept quiet. I said, "Don't worry, I promise the samovar will be going at all hours, releasing cardamom vapors, and that she will always have her share of white fish served on decorated ceramic plates." I spoke as though I were relaying a message of comfort directly to her dead beloveds. I was convinced that Khorshid deserved an idyllic life. That any pleasure I provided her with would be conveyed to her deceased humans. I didn't explain any of this to the sitter. I was certain that he would understand the words, but remain unable to grasp their implications. Sure, he was tender-hearted. He had, after all, wanted to speak to Khorshid about the disaster, to communicate with the cat, who existed beyond language, that a period of grief had manifested itself in her life and that she would do well to surrender to it rather than rage against its injustices. What this attitude conveyed to me was that the sitter *felt* his body, did not shy away from its wiser, more buried registers. But he was not *my people*. There was no one planting grenades at his feet or watching his thermal shadow on a screen or tracking his every move convinced that he was a purveyor of violence. His life, I'd thought, remembering again the black ribbon of the runway which had taken on a liquid aspect as the plane on which I'd fled Tehran took off into a sky stripped of stars, was not conditional. So, I refrained from providing explanatory notes. Neither did I

care nor think about how this transmission of pleasure from Khorshid to her family, who had been eviscerated mid-air, would take place. I just needed to believe that it would.

I'd first seen Khorshid's picture on Twitter. I'd been sitting at the kitchen table, looking at the videos of the explosion, tracing the missiles' upward trajectories as they carved their way toward the passenger plane and then watching the plane, lit as the sun, tumble down the bruised sky. So when I saw the caption that accompanied her photo—"Cat needs to be rehomed. Owners disappeared. Victims of the Ukrainian passenger plane that was shot down"—I felt someone was carving the word *disappeared* into my heart with the blunt tip of a pen. That's what had happened, I'd thought, staring at Khorshid's high cheek bones and exaggeratedly long whiskers, her green eyes through which she looked out at the world in shock: her owner's deaths had been a kind of disappearance. No bodies had been recovered. They had turned to ash mid-air and taken their place next to all of the unburied dead killed at the evil hands of tender-egoed dictators from around the globe, pawns of toxic political transactions. I will take her, I wrote instantly to Khorshid's pet sitter, with a definitive tone of undeniable commitment, I will love her with all of my soul. I was aware that my language was over the top. I didn't care. The situation was extreme, the times dire. Why should I hold back? I'd thought as I sat at the kitchen table looking out at the passerby in their long windproof coats, their heads wrapped in wool, walking crookedly, making little jumps to avoid the puddles of black ice that always clog the arteries of Chicago in winter. Then I leaned into my reply, my plea which was also a pledge, and DM'd him. I wrote, I will pay for her to be put on a plane this instant; she is my Khorshid, I can feel it in my bones. Then I put my coat on and walked to the lakefront. I stood there, in the harsh wind and watched the water crash and rebound against the breakwater. I watched the foam and froth lift into the air, shatter into a million brilliant droplets of shiny water before they dropped again into the black depths of that icy lake that reminds me so often of the Caspian, which is just as moody, just as much of a trickster, pulling swimmers into its entrails and yanking them around until they go limp, a sea disguised as a lake, hemmed in by land and in a rage because of it. I paced around restlessly for hours, hunched up with homesickness and sobbing in my grief. Then I'd gone home and called the pet sitter.

It had taken a few weeks to settle the adoption. In the interim, my roommate Fereshteh and I had barely spoken a word. We were catatonic. Occasionally, I would find her cooking eggs at the stove, her computer open on the counter behind her, the Skype screen displaying her mother seated on a sofa beneath wide windows through which I could gleam the triumphant ring of mountains that crown Tehran, making it difficult for the pollution to escape. Each time I'd see the Tehran sky on the screen, it appeared to



be heavy with artillery, full of ashes and the soot of the dead. Her mother and I would wave at one another politely and shake our heads in a sign of shared remorse, as if to say, *I see your pain and I am not afraid to greet it, but I have run out of words*. If Fereshteh and I spoke at all during those days, it was to exchange verses from the latest book we were reading together and which we kept on the living room bar cart next to the bottles of Arak we had accumulated over the years. We were reading Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory of Forgetfulness*. Every time we crossed paths in the living room, one of us would pick the book up and recite, "Are you well? I mean, are you alive?" The other, having memorized slivers from the book, would answer, "Don't die completely," or, maybe, "Don't die at all." That was the extent of our language those days. Until, that is, Khorshid arrived, bald, her skin raw from all of that anxious licking, and lit the fires of our hearts again, loosened our tongues.

The day of Khorshid's arrival, I stood at on my toes and squinted beneath the bright overhead lights that lined the low ceiling of the Chicago airport. I was straining to look over the beanie heads of passengers and those who'd come to greet them, eager, expectant. My heart was racing. I was trying, desperately, to spot her crate; sweating despite the fact that the airport air was damp with a biting winter chill. I kept imagining her fearfully pressing her face against the bars of the crate. That face of hers which I'd first seen on my Twitter feed and that had stolen my heart, ceased it instantly and with such brute force that later, once she'd settled into our apartment, I would come to forget that I'd ever led my life without her weaving between my legs, licking my tired eyes, yawning in my face at dawn. I kept thinking I'd spotted her amid the parting airport crowd and would squeeze Fereshte's hand and whisper her name, "Khorshid!" with a sigh that my roommate, less melancholic than I, found desperate but which she nonetheless echoed in solidarity. I'd said her name over and over again all the way home as we drove along the belt that hugs the curves of the lake, which was so blue that day, bright and full of an unexpected light. Khorshid occasionally emitted a reluctant reply which we took as an indication that she knew she was safe again, that somehow, by the grace of god, if Khorshid, unlike us, was one to believe in god, she'd made it through the worst of it.

Fereshteh was largely silent, serious, perhaps even austere. Wide shafts of light came through the car window and made her fingers, white from gripping the steering wheel, look translucent. In that oxidized light, she looked to me like a ghost. She turned to me and said, "Today, while I was finishing Darwish's book, I had an awful feeling that the world is a book and that we are all characters trapped in separate chapters, on different levels of reality that don't necessarily intersect, and that the whole thing, this book that is our lives, will be torn to bits soon and that we will all be floundering in a sea of sorrows."

I looked at the lake. It was beautiful, glittering, immense. I wondered if Fereshteh was quoting Darwish, but I couldn't recall having read those exact words. Her eyes were shining with restrained remorse, as if she'd betrayed a secret she'd been entrusted with and had been unable to bite her tongue.

I tried to make sense of her words.

"Do you mean to say we need a new script?," I asked. "That this life, as we've come to know it, is about to expire?"

"Worse," she said, fixing her gaze on the road, "like our lives are going to gradually disappear and that it will feel to us stranger than death, than dying, that we will be alive, able to see and hear the world, but we will lack all understanding of how to operate within it."

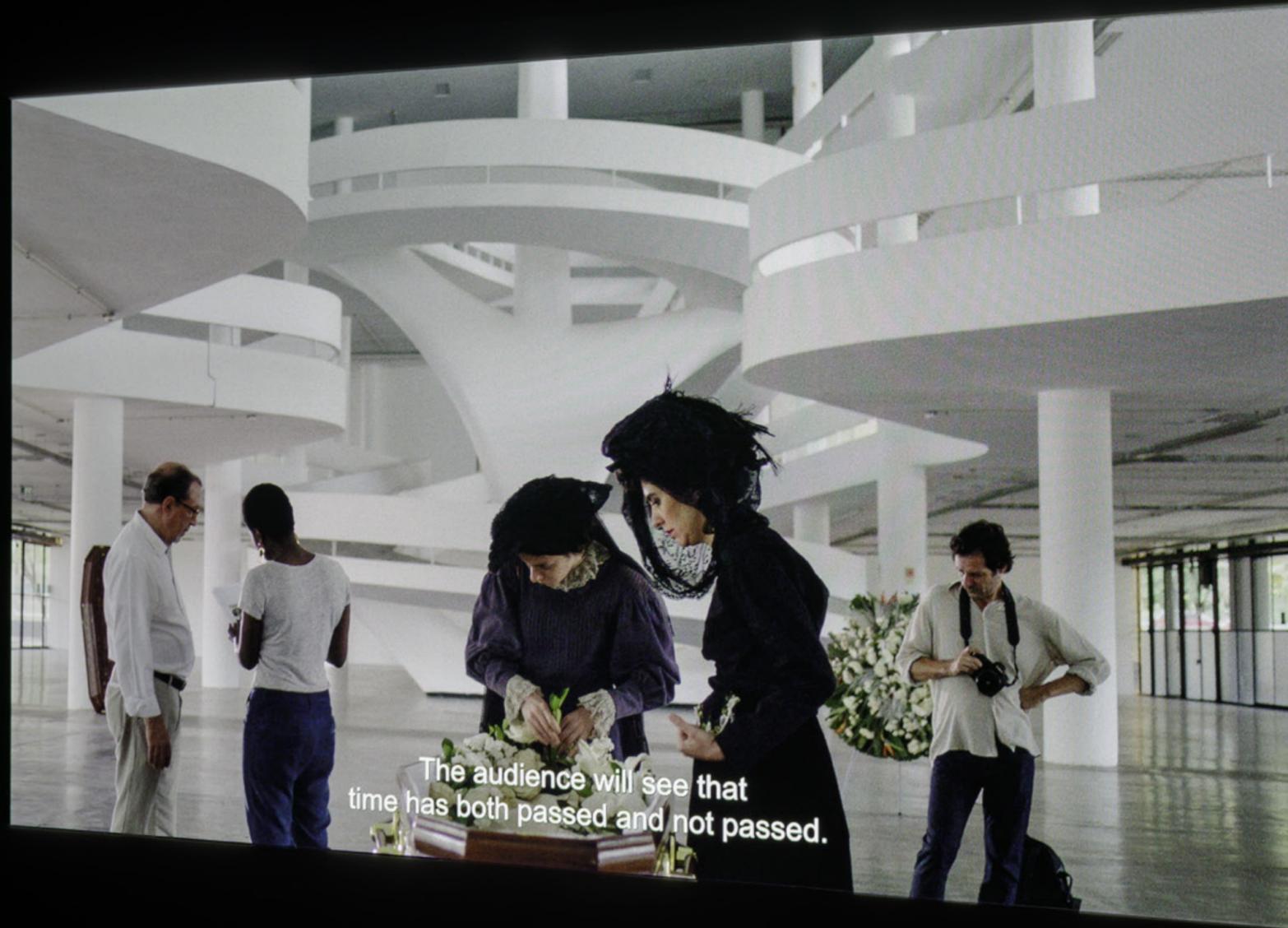
I didn't know how to respond, so I didn't say a word. I thought of what the pet sitter had said, of that odd sensation he'd described to me; how the boundaries of his body had become diffuse and merged with Khorshid's, and pictured his mouth sliding off his face. I thought to myself, great ruptures have happened before. Empires have collapsed. Civilizations have gone extinct. I looked again at the lake. It appeared swollen to me, as though the water levels had been rising by nearly imperceptible degrees. Up above, the sun was on fire. A thousand flames shot out of it. It looked like a wheel caught on fire; it was branding its burning tentacles onto the immense lake.

"I'm telling you," Fereshteh said, turning to look through the passenger side window at that sun, "something sinister is afoot. I can feel it."

I opened the crate and put my hand on Khorshid's arched back and felt her slim body twist to find a new shape. I felt her muscles relax. Her engine, that little roar, ancient, guttural, came on. The sound of her purr kept my heart beating steady even though I could see shadowy figures rising from the glassy blue horizon, plumes of grey smoke being sucked into that rabid sun.







The audience will see that
time has both passed and not passed.



They were pointing their guns at the readers.



LONG BEFORE I WAS THERE



ON ASKING QUESTIONS

As *Nine Lives* came into focus, a set of open-ended questions emerged simultaneously with the exhibition. The various artworks here, or the protagonists appearing within them, provoked expansive conversations as time went on and began to suggest a larger environment for thought. The following questions help to mark out this terrain, without mapping it exhaustively. As the show opened, these questions appeared on the exhibition poster and were mailed out to the museum's members—as floating prompts dispatched to disparate houses, potentially inviting conversations around the breakfast table or during now-ubiquitous Zoom chats. Reading these questions might offer different ways to think about works in the show, while also encouraging more personal reflections: how might these questions apply in your life? Eventually these questions were also posed to the participating artists, many of whom chose one or two to answer in the form of a brief audio recording. Their responses are transcribed here in the following pages, and joined by reflections from two of the artists that are excerpted from earlier interviews.

HOW DO STORIES SHAPE OUR LIVES? THE WAY WE SEE THE WORLD AROUND US?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AT A NARRATIVE'S CENTER? AT ITS MARGINS?

WHAT FORMS CAN READING TAKE? OR TRANSLATING? AND WHAT'S AT STAKE IN EACH CASE?

WHAT IS AN INNER LIFE? WHAT IS A SOCIAL LIFE? WHERE DO THEY SEPARATE OR CONVERGE?

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN AGENCY? WHAT ARE THE BOUNDS OF YOUR INFLUENCE?

WHERE IS HISTORY? DO YOU THINK ABOUT REWRITING IT?

WHEN DOES EVERYDAY LIFE BECOME SOMETHING ELSE?

ARE STORIES ALIVE?



ON ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

Toyin Ojih Odutola

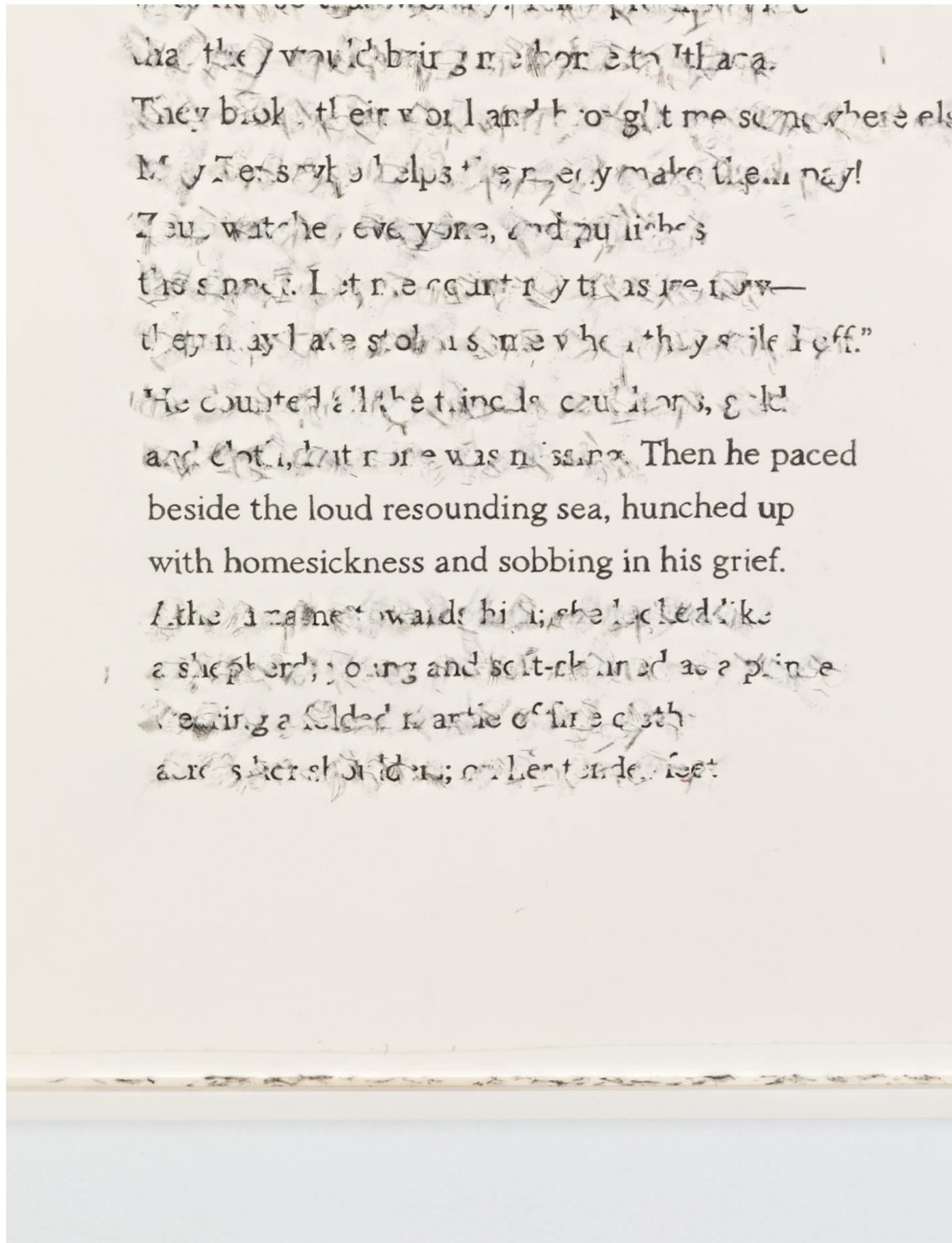
I don't consider myself a writer. My writing is as episodic as my drawings. Once I sort out a story's outline and key themes, I select the scenes I want to explore more deeply, and they eventually transform into sketches. At this point I'll also focus on research about a specific time period in Nigeria. With that scaffolding, I delve into plot points and build out the characters' relationships to one another. Depending on how complex a particular drawing is, I'll do ten to twenty sketches. I am weaving something that I hope is not necessarily about text, which is like a safety net for me, but rather about a visual language with cues that words cannot provide. However, I need text to give me the permission to draw. They are two intertwining paths...

I wanted to distance myself, as Toyin, from the work. When I started this series in 2016, I was wary of how even my fictional work was still about me as an artist of color. My otherness often precedes the content of the work, almost like a cloud before the viewer. Once I became the Deputy Private Secretary on the press release [for the original exhibitions featuring this body of work], the viewer stopped looking into my involvement and tried to grasp the story. I was freed from the distraction of the story somehow being about me. With this new role, I have the freedom to say, I am the communication liaison between the public and this family, but I only reveal just enough of what I find necessary. The work is not about a mythology or a presumption about African-ness. The viewer is immersed in the narrative, an alternative reality.

Excerpted from a conversation with Osman Can Yerebakan, "There is No Story That is Not True: An Interview with Toyin Ojih Odutola," in The Paris Review, September 27, 2018, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/09/27/there-is-no-story-that-is-not-true-an-interview-with-toyin-ojih-odutola/>

Opposite (detail) and following page:
Toyin Ojih Odutola, *In the Drawing Room*, 2018





ON RESHAPING A STORY

Bethany Collins

I came to *The Odyssey* specifically for Book 13, where after ten years at war, and ten years weeping on every wrong shoreline he lands upon, Odysseus finally reaches his homeland. He stands on the shoreline of his own country and does not recognize the place. Which felt like an apt description of that post 2016 election moment for me, when a place, particularly your own homeland, can feel simultaneously familiar and estranging.

What's also interesting about this ancient text of exile, and homecoming, and strangeness among intimates is that there is no agreement even about this ancient text. In fact, the first line of *The Odyssey* has been translated at least thirty-six distinct ways. And this is the line where we find out, who is this man? Before we follow you on this epic journey home, who is Odysseus? Translations have run the gamut from positive to negative. He is crafty, or cunning, mischievous, adventurous, tossed to and fro by fate; or, he's a hero. But Emily Wilson, the first woman to translate *The Odyssey* into English in 2017, writes or translates, no, "he was a complicated man."

Translations are a myriad of choices by, if not subjective, then flawed hands. They will never be the original. And so it matters who translates our stories, because they craft the world. It matters so much that in 1852, a translator of *The Odyssey* translates Odysseus first questions to Athena upon arriving to his own homeland to be: "What men are born here?" But in 1980, another translator writes: "Who are the people who dwell in it?" They are not the same question, but they come from the same origin text.

Opposite (detail) and following page:
Bethany Collins, *The Odyssey*: 2001 / 2017, 2020

Dedicated to Ida B. Wells

For two women's choirs, two glockenspiels (or other metallophone), two drums, and coins

The performers may use the flag or the newspapers or both for performance.

Two choirs are situated on opposite ends of a field, street, town square, or any open space, facing each other. There is a deliberate distance between the two choirs, though all events should be audible and visible to both sets of performers. Each choir has at least 10 members, a drum, a glockenspiel, and a bucket of coins.

Choir A reads the score from top to bottom until they reach the middle black section.

Choir B reads the score from bottom to top until they reach the middle black section.

A drummer is assigned by/for each group and a single coordinated drum hit from both initiates each event. When to proceed to the next event is decided jointly by the drummer in each choir.

Event#1

Choir A: Remain silent until the next cue.

Choir B: A performer tosses coins onto the glockenspiel (this action continues until the middle black section.)

Event#2

Choir A: Coins are tossed at the glockenspiel by twice as many performers as Choir B utilized in Event#1. (This action continues until the middle black section.)

Choir B: Roughly 1/3 of the choir repeatedly sings the words "*The New Cry*," using any pitches, within three beats followed by two beats of rest. Each singer can follow their own tempo, and need not be synchronized to any other singer. (This action continues until the middle black section.)

Event#3

Choir A: Roughly 1/2 of the choir repeatedly sings the words "*Ray of Light*," using any pitches, beginning with any word of the phrase. A rest should occur after each of two words, while the third word of the phrase immediately loops back to the start with no rest. Each singer can follow their own tempo, and need not be synchronized to any other singer. (This action continues until the middle black section.)

Choir B: The drummer hits the drum four times with one beat of rest. (The drummer will continue this action until the middle black section while continuing to cue the next sections with the opposing choir drummer.)

Event#4

Choir A: Anyone not singing should sing the words "*Side by Side*" as a melody with the contour of the notated graphic, followed by two beats of rest.

Choir B: Anyone not singing should sing the words "*Light of Truth*" as a melody with the contour of the notated graphic, followed by two beats of rest.

Black Section

(Everyone): On four beats, synching with the drummer from Choir B, all sing the words "*Onward, Skyward*," any pitches, followed by one beat of rest. Individually, each singer may speed up slightly, so as to fall out of synch with the others.

When each desires, they may walk away from the ensemble, continuing to sing until no one else from the performance is within visible range.

Think and act on independent lines in this behalf...

July 2020 / Albuquerque, NM

ON LISTENING INTENTLY

Raven Chacon

Stories have a way of embedding themselves into their listeners. This embedding might happen immediately and stay with you forever, or it could have happened years ago, emerging at opportune times, or in the middle of a sleepless night. I've thought hard about this, and try to avoid such moralizing, but I do believe all stories have a lesson. They do not even need to be true stories, they can be complete fiction, but one thing I believe is that they are a sequence of signs that point to another life. And if they remain unclear or unresolved, these are especially those bits that stay with us forever.

We share and create stories as extensions of our lives or every life we have ever encountered, again whether they be real or imaginary people or beings. These stories become us and if nothing else, we can give them to others, so that a piece of you goes on with that listener. It mixes with their memories and experiences. We become reminded that we are the universe together.

The mind is constantly reading and interpreting, or translating. One might forget that there is always an opportunity to stare at something, or touch it, or listen to it, for a very long time and if given enough attention, this thing (whether it is an object or a sound) can infinitely provide information about why it exists. It can provide information about where you exist, in relation to the thing you are reading, or staring at, or listening intently to. I think this may be one of the few agencies we have. To give attention to something when we want. Of course, other attentions won't leave us alone.

Opposite and pages 37-38:

Raven Chacon, *American Ledger No. 3*, 2020 (details)

Dedicated to

Raven Chacon

Dedicated to

Raven Chacon

No.3

American Ledger No.3

(...In All Its Phases)

Dedicated to Ida B. Wells

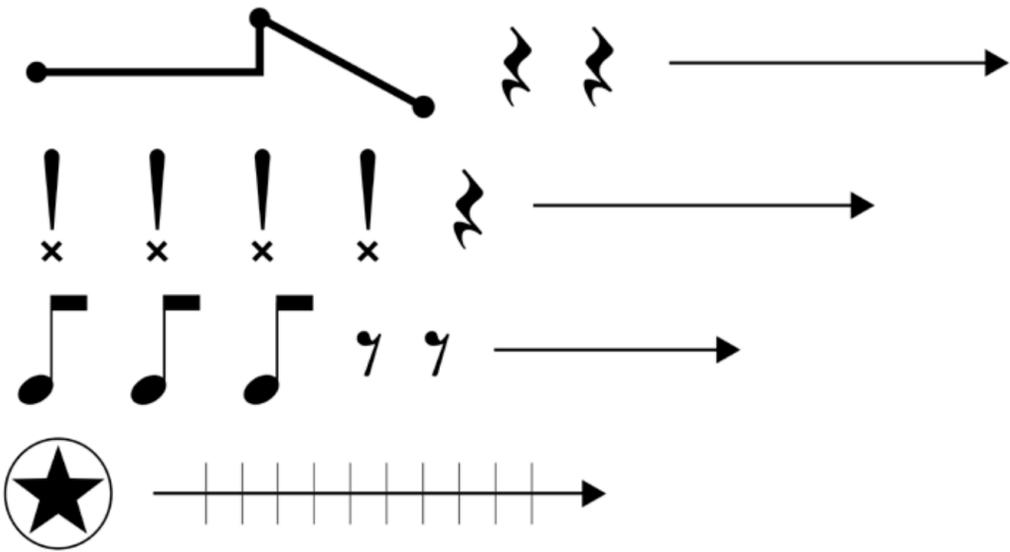
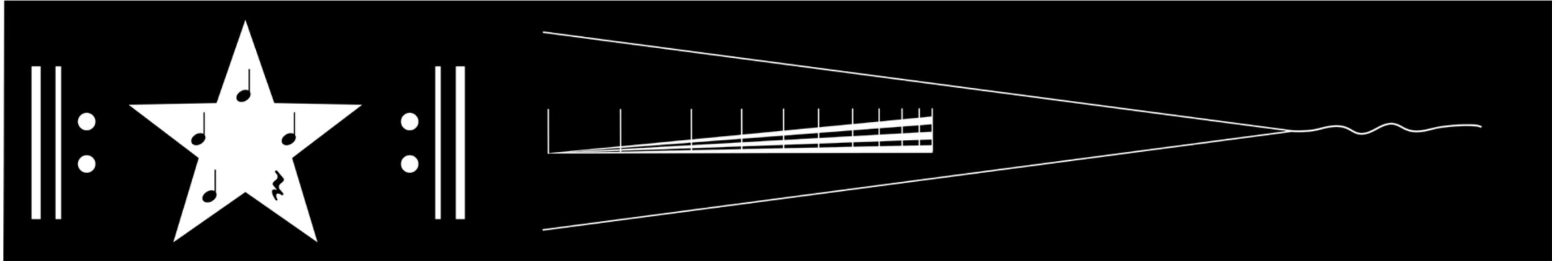
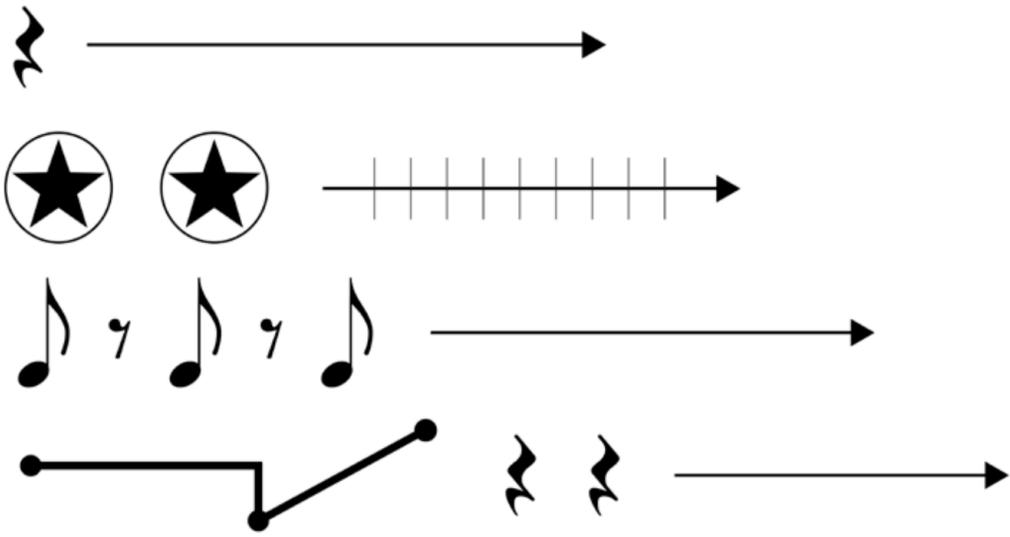
Raven Chacon

American Ledger

(...In All Its Phases)

Ida B. Wells

Raven Chacon





ON PRIVATE SPHERES

Aliza Nisenbaum

In 2015, I was part of a fellowship for immigrant women leaders sponsored by the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Kayhan Irani, depicted in my painting in *Nine Lives*, was the group organizer for that fellowship. After that residency, I decided to paint the fifteen women who participated in that group as a way of reflecting on how each of them goes out into social life with the various NGOs and grassroots organizations they worked in. Subsequently, Kayhan and I stayed in touch and became friends.

I was curious about the relationship between the activist work each of the women do, and to think about that in relation to their private spheres as well. So I reached out and painted many of them in their homes. I've painted Kayhan three times now. Once as part of this larger group. Then, I went to her home and painted her reading, surrounded by the art found in her home. Kayhan is a writer and a Theatre of the Oppressed trainer. She has a book out that is very relevant to this exhibition: *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims*. In this book, storytelling is used as a strategy for speaking out for justice.

The third time I painted Kayhan is the portrait in this exhibition, which is subtitled *Resistance Begins at Home*. I took the title from a *New York Times* article about community activism that begins with traditions found in the home. The private sphere can be thought of as a place of absolute freedom, but it is also linked in many ways to notions of autonomy, activity that is separate from the state; that is, family or friends, or even work that revolves around individuals and not institutions, though the state may try to intrude into them as well. I wonder how the private can at times mimic larger power structures, or alternatively, be the seed for our feelings of empowerment and agency, particularly as women whose decisions made in private are oftentimes politicized.

Opposite and following page (detail):
Aliza Nisenbaum, *Kayhan Reading the New York Times (Resistance Begins at Home)*, 2017

ON THE CENTER OF NARRATIVES

Kayhan Irani

The question is: what happens when we are marginalized? From our own story and our own lives. The work that I'm exploring right now seeks to understand how those traumas that we endure, how those hurtful experiences that we endure cause small breaks in our understanding of where we belong, who we belong to, or even our sense of belonging in the world.

Every human being is at the center of their own narrative. And it's not a selfish thing. It's actually an experiential embodied thing. The tingle, the aches, the sweats, and the breath that I experience color and shape the way I see my day. The point of systematic racism or systematic oppression is to convince us that who we are—all our potential, all the possibility that we have tied up in ourselves—and the experience that we've lived and the things that we've seen, are not valid, or are ranked in terms of validity according to our skin color, our gender expression, our class background. And so the work that I'm exploring right now asks us to use storytelling as a way to uncover those memories of hurt, uncover those memories of when we were cast out of our own lives, when we were cast out of the universe that we thought we belonged to. When we made a decision then to stay outside of that universe, we made the decision to limit our power, to obscure it or bury it in some way.

In uncovering and unveiling what has been obscured, we can actually reclaim and connect to who we truly are, our soul's purpose, but also all the potential that the future holds for us. We don't have to live according to those past decisions, we don't have to live according to the ways in which we might have previously shaped our narrative. There's a line in the piece I'm writing that says: "Every retelling gives me new vision. Each memory is a chance to start again." And so what might that mean, if we started again from our memories?

Kayhan Irani is a writer, performer, and leader of theater workshops. She is the subject in Aliza Nisenbaum's painting Kayhan Reading the New York Times (Resistance Begins at Home).



from THE FIFTH WOUND (2020)

Maisie Mattia

Are you a man?

No.

Are you a woman?

No.

Are you a god in disguise?

No.

What are you?

I am a blurry object.

I want to say that I feel, at last, like I can think. I can hear the beginning of a new song. Perhaps it's because I'm hidden in a copse of cypress trees with no audience other than vultures and strawberries, no longer distracted by men and women asking me to explain, to explain and reexplain the simplest facts about my fairy mind and its fairy desires. I just can't do that. Real sorry, ma'am. 'Minimalism' is a luxury that belongs to people who can expect to be understood. There would be no need for rumination, for the double helix of dependent clauses which fairy-shame irrepressibly encodes into any assertion, if a girl could assume her subtext were a universal truth: but the species of eyeless skull-dwelling spirits whose echolocating astral howls sometimes scramble and restructure my inner monologues such that every thought, rather than performing a fearful recursion of the last, briefly assumes the flavor of a revelation as bright and unrecoverable as a blue star dissolving in a kaleidoscope's rainbow abyss, are fitful, unpredictable, certainly not universal, so unless I make myself extravagantly explicit, unless I ensure every atom of my vision is as rococo as a Fabergé egg, unless I trap my reader's precarious faith in sentences as labyrinthine as Escher's staircases, such that any attempt to disprove me results, inevitably, in vertigo, that is,

unless I sublimate my confessions into a Gordian equation of symbols, who will believe in my outraged scrap of self? Most every fairy I know is a maximalist because we fear each chance is our last and only chance to speak.

Look, if you have seen my photographs, then you know about my surgeries, I don't need to tell you. And if you haven't seen my photographs, the truth is I don't know you, and you probably want to see them to decide for yourself whether I look enough like a woman for you to think of me as a woman. So let me tell you this: If you saw me only in the present moment of my face (if we had spent our whole lives not knowing one another and then you walked up to me at Mood Ring in 2020 and touched my forearm and said, 'I'm Ezekiel,' and if I turned to face you smelling like strawberry smoke and some memory of horses in a field, smiling languorously, saying, 'Honey...') by which I mean if you weren't studying my face like a palimpsestic scrap of parchment for any trace of a boy you once knew—well then without a doubt you would see a BRUNETTE BOMBSHELL WITH BUXOM BREASTS. And I am, it's true: I became my own mirage. But by saying this much I have already trespassed the vows of Womanhood, I have made my beauty speak when Beauty is made to be unspeakable. Beauty is a relationship between subject and object where the object in itself needs nothing and so expresses nothing, because it is fulfilled already by its form. For an object to speak itself is excessive. To save it from so much as the suggestion of indelicacy, the object is separated from language like cream from milk. Beauty is as silent as a block of butter.

But I can't help it—I am sprouting in the sunless furrows of your Brain, petal by petal I am transmitting a graft of my abject Eden to one of the dull wet wordless folds of your occipital lobe. What a pleasure. To be here with you. And somehow I'm sparkling to you, somehow my sentences are haunted by a sparkling. Because I have made a secret of the alphabet (I'm calling my story a 'secret of the alphabet') but it is a secret that reveals itself only to those who—well, let me say that one man's trash is another man's treasure. But there is a sparkling nonetheless, so let's pray for both our sakes that today you find treasure. May I be extravagant with you? I swear they always

misread my kitsch. I tell a story about a feather boa, and they applaud my courage. To them I'm always unintentional—caught in the act of my own candor. Once I spent a night in a stranger's arms, in an apartment crowded by ferns and old love letters and wooden reliquaries of ketamine and dehydrated oranges. He fingered me while I sipped coffee and talked about Tony Soprano's windblown bathrobe. The next morning I went to see my therapist, who asked me, at the end of our session, whether I knew my nipples were visible through the gauze of my sheer sequined blouse. She said she was genuinely worried I was unaware. As if I hadn't turned the head of every man on the sidewalk. And more than a few women, too. When I'm writing to you, truth be told, I remember that I am a 'transsexual.' I feel antiseptic. My love is cold, so cold—stuck like an echo in a series of caverns. It has been five years since I loved you like I was inventing love. Now I have nothing left but dry retches. Pass me the lipstick and I'll write it all down, my beauty so useless and a Siren song. Let me forget about you in the dazzle of bright lights, and I'll rip open another dimension where angels fall forever.

Excerpt chosen by the author to accompany Elle Pérez's photograph Mae at Riis, 2020. This text was included in a printed chapbook available to take away in the exhibition.

Elle Pérez
Mae at Riis, 2020





ON EMBODYING TRANSLATION

Hương Ngô

My installation is entitled *It was her handwriting that gave her away*. Translation is an embodying and a reperforming of the original writer. For me, it's often as much a technical act as it is an exercise in empathy. So when I'm translating documents like the ones in the vitrine, many of which are coming from the colonial civil police (or the Sûreté), and are those letters that they intercepted, I'm embodying their voices, their motivations and their perspectives.

In the translation of the intersectional Marxist historical analysis of women's struggles in Vietnam, *Vấn-đề phụ-nữ*, which is the document in the installation that's relief printed and framed, I'm negotiating the same ideologies and theories that are affecting the original author. In those surrounding letters, the ones that have been written in invisible ink and loosely pinned to the walls, the text of which you can hardly see, I'm tracing the handwriting—the movement, performance, and mark making of the original writer. So each time I trace the same word or letter, I become more and more familiar with the writer's handwriting, as you become familiar with a word in another language.

Though the meaning is invisible in those letters, they carry for me the most urgency. In this case, those letters were handwritten by the anticolonial revolutionary Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai to fellow women in the Resistance. They were speaking to each other of their lived realities of sex, pregnancy, and generally of being a woman within a male-dominated revolution, within a larger patriarchy. And it's her handwriting which eventually incriminated Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai. So to embody that handwriting, it's to be so intimately connected with her, our protagonist, as well as to those colonial authorities who eventually executed her.

Opposite and pages 44-46:
Hương Ngô, *It was her handwriting that gave her away*, 2020 (details)

literally "barbarians"
- (internalized racism / colonial ideology)

te]

- 1 -

cho họ làm; miễn là công việc ấy vô luận đó
đàn bà làm đều có một kết quả như nhau.
H sẽ giúp cho xã hội tăng thêm biết bao nhiều
lợi. Những nhà nghiên cứu khoa học học cho
đàn ông với đàn bà không khác gì nhau nữa;
tài, lương, tay chân, óc và gần cốt yếu. Họ
ngán ngẩm không cho. Ông, thì lấy sự tranh để
cổ nên mới ra thế dạng ấy. [Bây giờ nếu ta
đàn tộc để. Ông, đàn ông đàn bà đều làm
thấy ông đàn bà cũng không lép vế. tay
lên rất rất mạnh khỏe không khác gì đàn ông.
mạnh để họ phải nghỉ mệt 11 lâu mà thôi. Có
vì đàn bà mạnh khỏe nhưng vì không biết v.
để tranh để được một hai ngày để đi làm như
bà không thể nâng đàn bà lao động nặng
ng có ăn mà lúc để xong phải bỏ đi làm việc
đàn ông đều lý do xã hội hiện thời gây ra, đã
ng rất hại đến sức khỏe của đàn bà.]

Đàn: "Trình độ của đàn bà kém đàn ông. nên
phóng đàn bà của phải mở mang trình độ, đòi
đàn ông và làm nghề nghiệp. Việc
trình độ là điều yếu của bằng ngày của phụ nữ
nghề nghiệp vẫn là bước đường để tranh bình
đàn ông. [Nhưng trong một chế độ có người bóc
đàn ông này do nên giai cấp khác, có kẻ
nghèo, thì ngày trong đêm đàn ông cũng có
ng không có học thức. Một mặt nữa, ta lại thấy
đàn ông thất nghiệp, bị áp bức, bị bất bình.
có khoanh tay ngồi chờ, ở dưới chế độ xã hội
đàn ông và đàn bà đều có quyền.

of exploiter + exploited, where
there exists the division
a majority of men are
fact we see countless
ed, and not treated

unequal at home, women also cannot participate
in politics not in society.

→ [bình quyền]

Equality between men + women in the home + in society is a daily demand,
an essential need for all women, but taken from a class perspective, in some
capitalist societies, even when women demand the right to vote + nominate them-
selves in politics like men, the majority of women still do not have equality.

Đàn bà không được tham dự bầu. quyền như đàn ông. e
[Nắm nữ bình quyền trong gia đình và ngoài xã hội là
những điều yếu của bằng ngày, cần thiết cho hết
thầy đàn bà; nhưng ông... phương diện giai cấp ra
nên. ở mỗi vai trò tư bản, đàn ông bà đòi được quyền
tư bản cũ, ông cũ như đàn ông rồi mà đàn ông phụ nữ vẫn
không được bình đẳng. [Tỷ như trong gia đình, hai vợ
chồng người thì được bình đẳng; nhưng ra xã hội, vào
nhà máy, địa vị của hai vợ chồng lại khác nhau, vì rằng
người vợ vẫn bị bóc lột tàn nhẫn hơn. [Bây vậy - họ nên sự
tự do bình đẳng trong chế độ xã hội và bất bình đẳng.
việc triệt để giải phóng cho phụ nữ phải chống lại các
tranh đấu giải phóng cho giai cấp của lao, phải đánh lao
cái xã hội người bóc lột người.]

[Có kẻ người lại nói: "thời xưa từ thời đại xưa
quyền là thời đại phụ quyền hẳn rằng cũng phải trải
qua những cuộc tranh đấu để mà bình quyền mới được. e

[Còn phải đấu lý là câu phân tích lịch sử tiến hóa mới
rành như vậy. Từ thời đại mẫu quyền tới phụ quyền
là một tiến trình bình đẳng thay đổi mà cho... tiến ra.
cái không phải là giai cấp tranh đấu như ngày những
xã hội có giai cấp; vì rằng trong xã hội loài... ông với
đàn bà không chia thành giai cấp đối chọi - xã hội
chính quyền. [Đàn bà với đàn ông không phải là hai giai
cấp nhưng vẫn mang tính chất của riêng ông phát triển tới
ng bình đẳng giữa đàn ông và đàn bà cũng chính xác. Có
cái xã hội xã hội chủ nghĩa mới bình đẳng được sự rảnh rỗi
bất bình đẳng giữa người với người, vô luận đàn ông hay
đàn bà.]

For example in a family of laborers, even if the spouses are
equal, in the factory, their statuses are still different, since
women are more severely exploited.

Regarding freedom + equality in an oppressive + unequal society, [giải phóng phụ nữ]
the liberation of women has to go hand-in-hand with liberation of women
the liberation of the working class, against a society of
the oppressor + the oppressed.

some would even say, "from the time of patriarchal
societies to reach patriarchy, bloody struggles must
have occurred... [tới thời đại phụ quyền]

such an assessment is a prime example
of a rigid + mechanical way of historical analysis.

If the gap between individual economic foundations
for men + women continue to widen, then the
scale of inequality will continue tipping against
women.

→ [sự bình đẳng]

The problem of women is an important issue amongst social issues, essentially related to the economic + political foundation of society.

yet it is not necessarily the case that they are dependent on men like the feudalists and capitalists say: "the natural role of women is procreation and they cannot do it without men"; as the earth cannot give birth to plants and animals without the sky.

[phát xít] fascist

There is an idiom from Tsarist Russia: "As a chicken is not a bird, a woman is not a human."

Another proverb from China:

"Metal vessel is not considered copper as women are not considered human."

According to anthropology, history, + reality in terms of social aspects, women are born with the same status and qualities as men; in the course of societal development, they sometimes held the more important role in production and work progress.

[sự tiến bộ] - progress advancement

Vấn đề phụ nữ - 1938

The question / issue / problem of women

I. - Lời nói đầu

[Vấn đề phụ nữ là một vấn đề quan trọng trong những vấn đề xã hội, có một thiết liên lạc với nền tảng kinh tế, chính trị của xã hội loài người.] Nền kinh tế của mỗi một chế độ xã hội thay đổi, thì tình hình phụ nữ cũng thay đổi, cũng như mối liên hệ giữa các tầng xã hội tùy theo kinh tế thay đổi mà thay đổi vậy. Nhưng không phải phụ nữ là một giai cấp riêng, đối lập với Nam giới, chuyên tranh đấu cho bản thân mình mà quên đi lợi ích của dân tộc, vì cũng không phải là một giai cấp phụ thuộc của ông như bọn tư bản phong kiến thường nói: "vì tính thiếu thốn mà đàn bà sanh ra để để người, mà muốn sanh đẻ thì phải có ông; cũng như ông đòi phải có trời mới sanh ra cây cỏ và các loài vật; vì thế cho nên đàn bà phụ thuộc ông; làm vợ, đẻ con, lo làm việc nhà là bổn phận trời cho đàn bà." Đó là lý thuyết phản động mà ngày nay bọn phát xít dựa vào để đẩy ông, đẩy bà, ở đời Nguyên hồng có câu tục ngữ: "Cả không phải chim, đàn bà không phải người." Ở Tàu có câu: "Sĩ tôn không thể cho là đàn bà không thể cho là người đàng."

Theo khoa học, theo sự tiến bộ lịch sử mà nói, đàn bà là người, về các phương diện xã hội, có đủ tư cách sánh bằng nam giới; trong quá trình phát triển xã hội loài người có lúc họ đóng vai trò quan trọng hơn đàn ông, giải quyết những sự kiện xã hội. Nói chung thì về mặt sản xuất, đàn bà có nhiều nhiệm vụ quan trọng. Về mặt kỹ thuật phát triển giống loài người - tức nhiều mặt phải có cả đàn ông với đàn bà mới được, song đó

80 Y. u. d. ch. 24. 59

[phân tích] loại học, lịch sử, 05 thật

When the child is born, the task of child rearing is not necessarily the sole responsibility of women.

If a social system can distribute resources equally, where people have a place to bring up their children, or have money to buy formula + food to nourish them, then the mother need not breastfeed for 1-2 yrs. But the problem is that there are rich + poor people in society.

↳ issue of class + race / gender

[kết thúc] - "end of story"

only the rich can "rest" after childbirth since they have money to buy formula + hire a wet nurse to care for the child.

so while childbirth is a special function of women, child-rearing is the common duty of human kind.

↳ [nhị phân - v. chung]

some say: "since woman's nature is weak, childbirth only weakens their ability, rendering them unequal to men in physical labor."

[Nói thế là sai] - That is wrong!

Moreover, women have been bound by the chains of backward customs and morals for thousands of years, while wearing the special duty of childbirth that drains away their strength

Thus there must be a sense of organization and understanding in the distribution of labor so that women can carry out jobs that are suitable for them.

[công việc xã hội] - work for society, social work, collective labor

nguyệt tú

chi minh khai

Truyện ký

nhà xuất bản phụ nữ

Lê-nin thường nói: Mỗi một người đàn bà nấu ăn phải tham gia việc quản lý Nhà nước. Giải phóng đàn bà ra khỏi bếp núc để kiến thiết xã hội». ... Một dân tộc mà bọn tu mi còn nằm khoanh trong xó bếp chưa biết quan tâm tới tiền đơ quốc gia xã hội, mà phụ nữ đang bị giam hãm nơi gia đình xó bếp, mà

nữ sĩ Tuyết Dung tại xưởng to lên cái thuyết «phụ nữ hồi gia», đó thật là trái ngược với trào lưu thế giới và trình độ tiến hóa của dân tộc, nên chỉ tôi và chị em Sài thành phải tuyên chiến với nữ sĩ Tuyết Dung, tức là tuyên chiến với học thuyết phản động của phong kiến, của tư bản, của phát xít vậy.

Muốn xem rõ vấn đề phụ nữ và trả lời cho nữ sĩ Tuyết Dung một cách đầy đủ hơn, các bạn đọc hãy tìm quyển «Vấn đề phụ nữ» do «Tân dân thư xã xuất bản»: Người viết bài tranh luận là Nguyễn Thị Kim Anh.

*Writer of the treatise "The Problem of Women" * * * Who is the author Nguyễn Thị Kim Anh?*

- Tác giả Nguyễn Thị Kim Anh là ai?
- Người phụ nữ nào có nhiều lý luận đối chọi trên báo chí chống thuyết «phụ nữ hồi gia» phản động của phát xít Hit-le? ... *is putting reactionary theories*

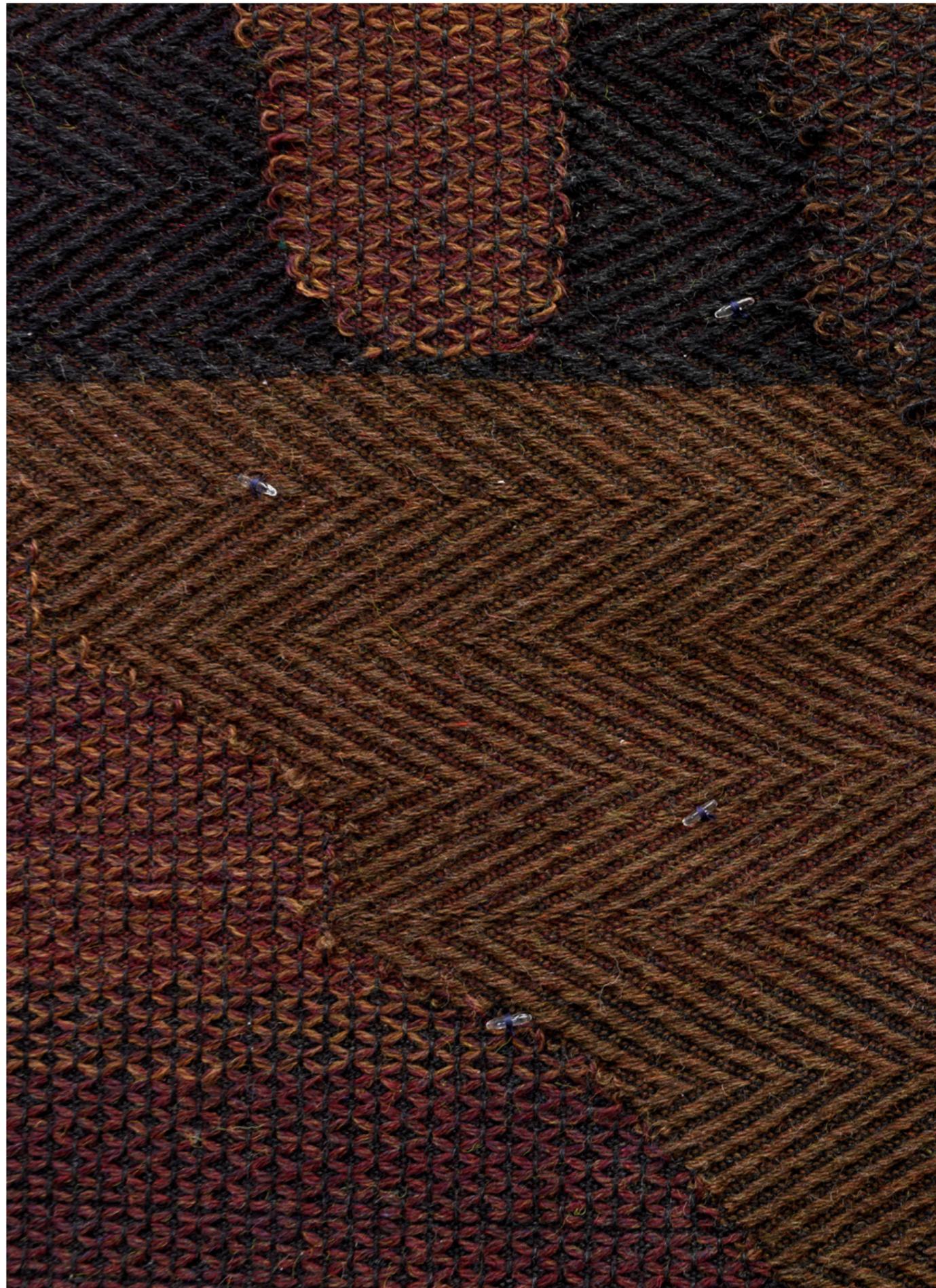
Đó là những câu hỏi mà các đại biểu phụ nữ đã trao đổi với nhau trong lớp huấn luyện mùa thu năm 1938, có chị Minh Khai về dự ấy.

fascist Hitler

19. NGƯỜI CỘNG TÁC VIÊN CỦA BÁO «DÂN CHÚNG»

Từ giữa năm 1938, phong trào đấu tranh đòi tự do ngôn luận, tự do xuất bản, tự do báo chí rất sôi nổi. Ngày 22 tháng 7 năm 1938, Đảng xuất bản tờ « Dân Chúng » không xin phép. Do khi thế đấu tranh mạnh mẽ của nhân dân Đông Dương, cộng thêm sự ủng hộ của các lực lượng tiền bộ ở Pháp, ngày 30 tháng 8

do deux
envelop
did you already
have your
if not - can
you then
bring your
child.



ON REIMAGINING DOCUMENTS

Kapwani Kiwanga

In this particular project, for *Nine Lives*, I was trying to continue an exploration of what kind of documents could be made which reference history but are neither text nor iconography. I see a work like *Repository* as a study for a document, referring to a past and a particular history but also remaining very open. It was a way to explore the limits of the archive, the limits of our systems of documentation, and to somehow acknowledge a past without having to be authoritative about it. That's what I had in mind when I spoke of "textile as text" in our conversations. Of course, there are many cultures that have created complex systems in which textile carries a symbolic language in terms of cosmology and cosmogony, or value systems that are literally woven into textile and sometimes worn. But in this case, it was really thinking about what a different type of documentation could be. What would another attempt at an archive look like?

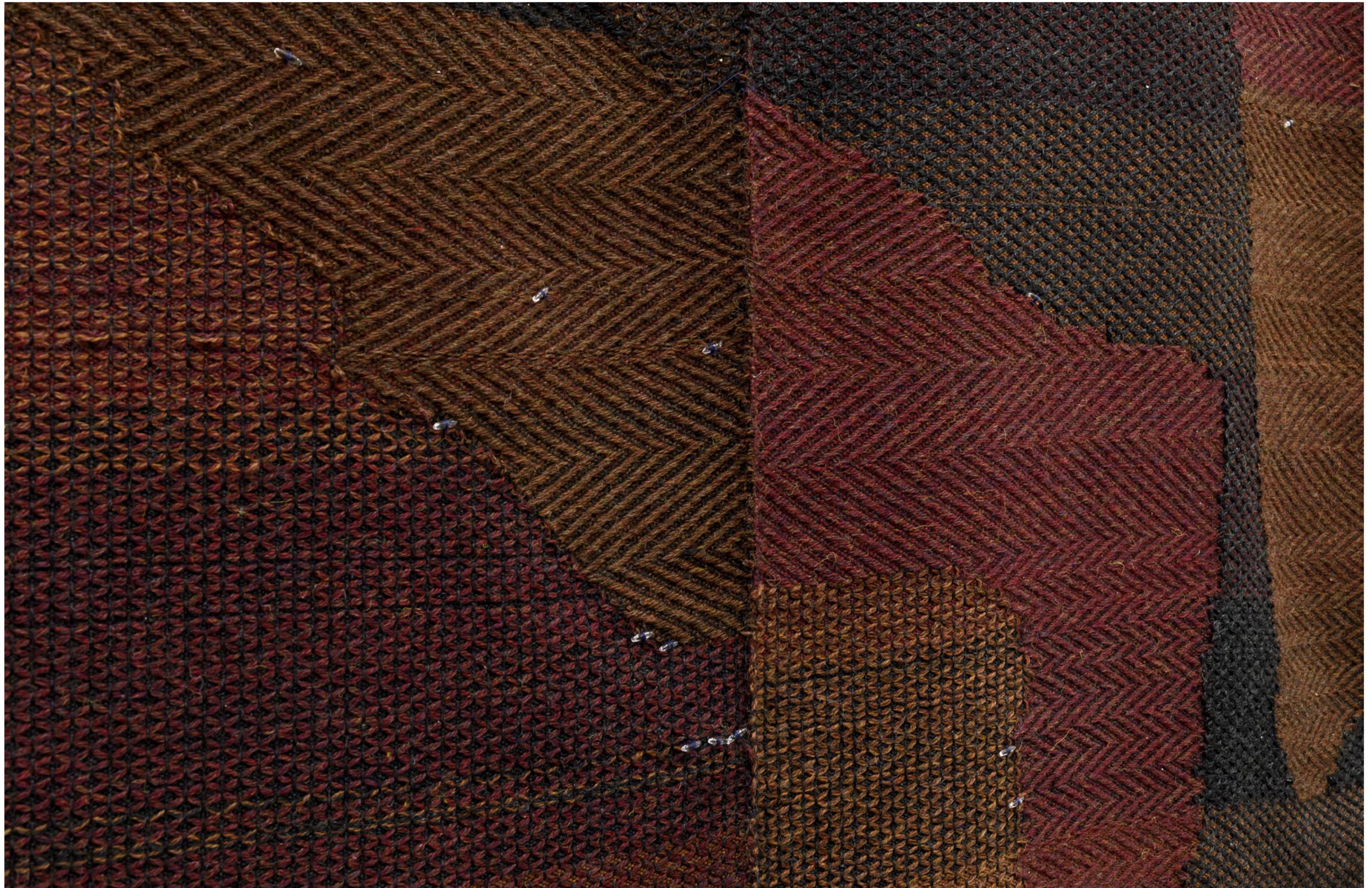
From a public conversation with Kapwani Kiwanga, Bronwyn Katz, and Romi Crawford on October 24, 2020, co-presented by the Renaissance Society and the Arts Club of Chicago.

Opposite (detail), page 48, and pages 49-50 (details):

Kapwani Kiwanga, *Repository*, 2020

Tapestry production: John Paul Morabito, Glass production: Ignite Glass Studios







from ESTROGEN (2018)

Maisie Mattia

We uncover our eyes, we raise our heads. A vast powder blue galley is shipwrecked in the swaying grasses of the pasture; sails in the shape of orchids hang from the masts.

Anastasia's ageless corpse adorns the prow. Ochre mushrooms bloom from her skin; jessamine bursts open between her legs; turquoise moss, bespattered with milky dew, sprouts from her breasts. She reeks of rotten oranges. Slowly, very slowly, she swivels her gaze toward our gaping faces. Then she smiles. Her teeth are jagged shards of porcelain. 'There are lakes,' she says. 'Subterranean reservoirs, deep beneath the soil. I can feel them. We will find them if we follow the roots of the trees.'

We board the galley. Laughter echoes up from our lungs; we pass around glasses of rosé. Then the earth shifts. Cracks resound between the cliffs; the very air begins to vibrate. We cling to lacquered curlicues, porcelain levers, Andalusian horsehair ropes. We peer off the prow. A portal rips open in the pasture, swallowing clumps of grass and crumbling granite, forming an abyssal aqueduct, a slanted tunnel of pink bedrock which funnels a stream of frothing milk into the dark. The milk flows from Anastasia's breasts, down her hips, past her toes. She gasps from the effort; she stifles screams. Her skin is riddled with infinitesimal cracks, forking, webbing; with every breath, these widen, threaten to tear asunder. But then she exhales a final breath; then the prow tips forward, and we slip, at last, beneath the surface. There is nothing new under the sun. But under the soil is another question. At first we see nothing but a diminishing point of light, hear nothing but the splash of liquid, and smell nothing but damp moss. Then our senses are stolen, diminished to the limit of nonsense: sensation as faint as a remembered face, a remembered voice. For this interval of underworld we possess only heartbeats, pulsating organs, the internal rush and squirt of fluid; we are bodies not seen, not heard; only felt. Time is difficult to measure. Then something brushes our cheeks, faint and swift. I say *deja-vu*, an untraceable memory of peacock feathers; I say the passing wings of silver-haired bats; I say a long-lost angel, who remembers God only as a density of light, and so

seeks Him, mistakenly, in the Earth's molten core. Our breath expands the width of an instant, even if not the length; angels, bats, and feathers swirl and swarm inside a closed sphere.

Now we are dazzled by sudden free fall. The blue galley pours out into a lake of milk, within what soon reveals itself to be a vast domed cavern, whose floor, whose folds and clefts are festooned with bioluminescent fungus, swaying, glowing, offering the air a dim celadon haze through which moths the size of stingrays drift wantonly among glittering stalactites. Blind salamanders poke their eyeless pearlescent heads through the opaque surface of the lake, the neon fronds of their fernlike cherry-red gills shivering, twitching. We approach a dock: slats of driftwood wedged between two rows of stalagmites. I throw a pink marble anchor, you lower the gangplank. After we dismount, the vessel sinks behind us under the lake, where it will settle into curdled sludge. 'I will be here if you need me,' says Anastasia, half-submerged, pale bubbles popping from her lips.

Embowered by cascades of lion's mane mushrooms that appear to us like some spectral isomer of wistaria, a carved-oak cloister winds away through fields of fairy-fire; we follow it, whispering, emerging soon into what seems, at first glance, the unkempt ruins of an amphitheater, whose overgrown cut-stone seats vault up into the dark. We stand on the stage, where a 1926 Royal typewriter drips thick glistening ink down a mossy pedestal, glazed clusters of honey mushrooms bursting through its steel tendons like the unmarked keys of a divine rotten alphabet. Thin ochre roots branch from the rusted metal and disappear into tangled thickets of flora. 'I've seen this before,' you whisper. Suddenly a voice addresses us from the audience; we scan the ruins in search of its source.

The amphitheater is filled with a crowd of half-visible women, whose bodies are webbed within the innumerable forking roots of the typewriter's honey mushrooms. The roots infiltrate their ears, their mouths; their dreaming faces are still, silent, save for shivering eyelids. One among them opens her eyes, lifts her head. Airing herself with the crenellated fan of a splitgill mushroom, and bedecked in an enoki headdress,

this anonymous woman addresses us as her kin: 'Sistren, did you know that the splitgill possesses twenty-eight thousand distinct sexes? Inspiring, isn't it? I apologize that I cannot rise to meet you. You see,' she says, gesturing around herself—she is seated at the altitude of somnolent moths; her voice sifts through the everglade gloom, attenuated to an arrow of sound—'You see, we are all connected to the Library of Oneironautics, composing an Ode against the Apocalypse, which includes the howling of wolves, the laughter of hyenas, the mourning of beluga whales, various stanzas of birdsong, and of course, a few parthenogenetic silences, in honor of our fungal confrères. If you wish to join us... type a word into the typewriter...'

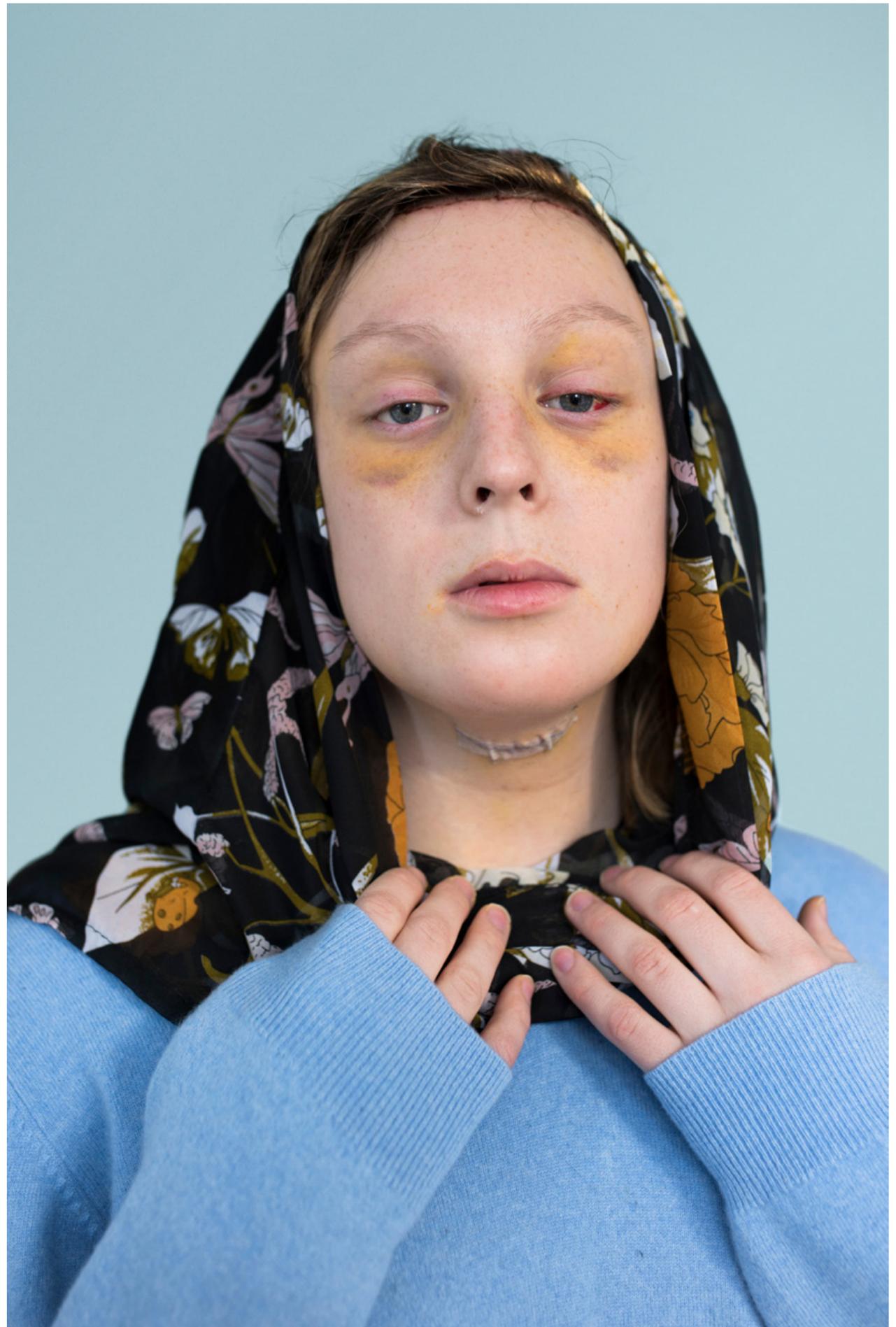
One after another we approach the pedestal. The chatter of keys echoes within the cavern, multiplying our single words into entire novels, then dissolving, once more, into silence. 'Sistren...,' says our anonymous host, yawning, sinking back into the roots.

She flicks her wrist with drowsy beneficence.

'Sistren,' she says.

'Goodnight.'

Excerpt chosen by the author to accompany Elle Pérez's photograph Mae (three days after), 2019. This text was included in a printed chapbook available to take away in the exhibition.



Elle Pérez
Mae (three days after), 2019

ON REWRITING HISTORY

Alison O'Daniel

When I try to locate history, I find myself in a pretty skeptical place. There have been so many examples coming to light over the last few years—and for much longer than that—that history has really been told in very particular ways by very particular people. And I'm pretty actively involved in rewriting certain histories. So in my film *The Tuba Thieves*, I became really interested in the act of writing a film, and the authorship of writing a film, and how complicated that is. When I started the project, I decided that I wanted to work like a composer, and kind of switch roles and have composers in some ways be the director. So I ask some composers to respond to different prompts, and then I listen to their scores and really let those scores direct me. And while I was doing that, I started to learn about all of these really specific anecdotal histories. One story I learned about was the Deaf Club in San Francisco, which was a deaf social club that became well-known in the punk scene because it opened its doors for about nine months to West Coast punk music and all of these shows were programmed there.

When I was researching the story, I was struck by the fact that the stories were really only told by hearing punks, and that there were no historical deaf anecdotes about this place. And the stories were charming, but they also had a lot of stereotypes and misperceptions and common misunderstandings about the deaf experience. One example was these stories about deaf people putting their hands on the speakers. And most deaf people know that this isn't really something that deaf people do, because deaf people are really sensitive to vibrations coming up through the floor, or in their chairs, or you know, just in the space. And so that seems like a romanticization told from a hearing perspective. I decided that I wanted to recreate the very last night that the Deaf Club hosted a punk show in 1979. And I was really eager to tell that story from a perspective that I had not found in any sort of literature or anecdotes or anything online, which was the perspective of being hard of hearing, which I am, and through a research process that really prioritized a lot of deaf people. We crafted this reimagining, basically, of that night. In some ways, it's this interesting revisionist history that I've been undergoing in telling the story of multiple concerts, and then much more intimately, really designing how a deaf woman who is a drummer would approach playing her drums in a small space privately on her own. I filmed a bunch of

scenes with Nyke Prince, who is a performer based in Los Angeles who has a relationship to drumming. And we focused much more on her organizing the space and really making it a safe space for her to start to approach these drums. I was really aware in telling the story that a very typical kind of hearing approach to this would be an “overcoming disability” story, like an obsession with a deaf drummer being just excellent at drums. And I was really not at all interested in that story.

Pages 54-58:
Alison O'Daniel, *The Tuba Thieves: The Drums*, 2013-ongoing (video stills)

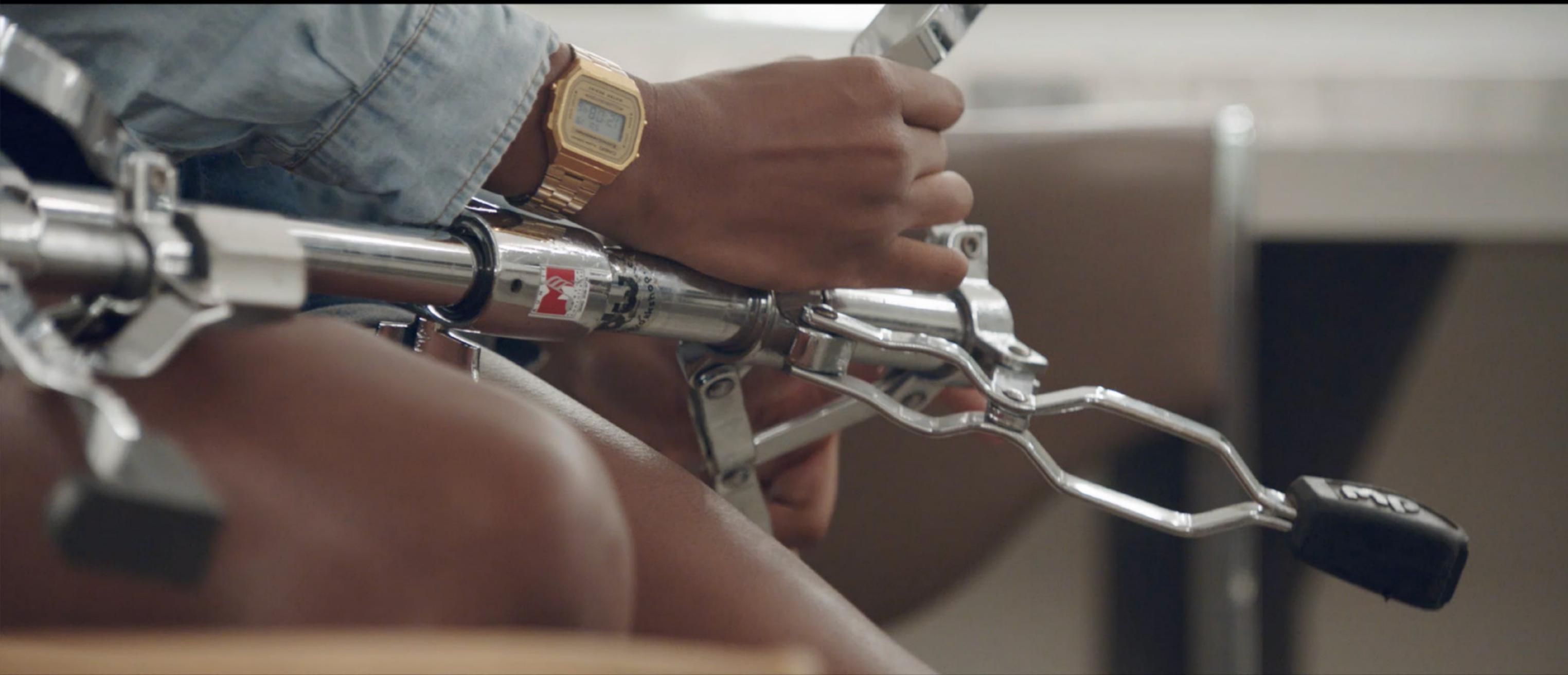




Dean Foods







from PETALS (2015)

Maisie Mattia

It's just that every time I loved lipstick my stomach ached and the only way to make it stop aching was prove that boys did not love lipstick, and so because I was a boy I did not love lipstick either. But all of a sudden I would love lipstick and because no one told me I could love lipstick, I thought that meant I could not love lipstick, and the more I loved it, the more I would die. I thought that the day I surrendered to that love was the day I would no longer be anything at all—I would not even be a butterfly. And butterflies barely exist. Butterflies are the residue of our dreams.

I need them to show me the way to the dark heavens. The heavens that are beneath our feet. It was by following butterflies that I became an author. 'Butterflies' are what I called the angels, falling in the distance. They led me into a cave, where I found a typewriter; they told me to sit before the typewriter and tell it my story. The typewriter listened, dim and glistening. Then it offered me the alphabet. Our vital riddle. Without it we do not even know our own names.

I want to say thank you to the devil, because the devil has the dark power of caves and roots and the devil is the princess of spring. The devil ripens fruits deep within the earth and offers it to us in sweetness. The devil invented the alphabet. But god forbids the alphabet in the kingdom of heaven. God has no language.

I have always wanted simple things, but the world told me I could not be simple and also love lipstick, I had to choose. So I renounced simple things, and because I renounced simple things I never learned that sometimes it is okay to be simple. And now I don't know how to tell a story, or how to buy fruits and vegetables at the market, or how to love you. But I am sentimental, when it comes down to it I am sentimental, and not intelligent, I don't understand riddles, I can never figure them out...

Perhaps if I write what the angels ask me to write, if I distribute their epistles, one day they will tell me why I loved you? But to explain my love does not require that I understand the explanation. So when I tell my story, then you will know why I loved you, but still I will not know. Just as I can write a

book about life and still not know what life is. But when you read it you will say: ah, so that's it. Because my vision was given to me in scraps, and so I wrote it in scraps. But it was given to you like a pebble is given, or the dawn. It was given to you like the gust of a great wing. All at once.

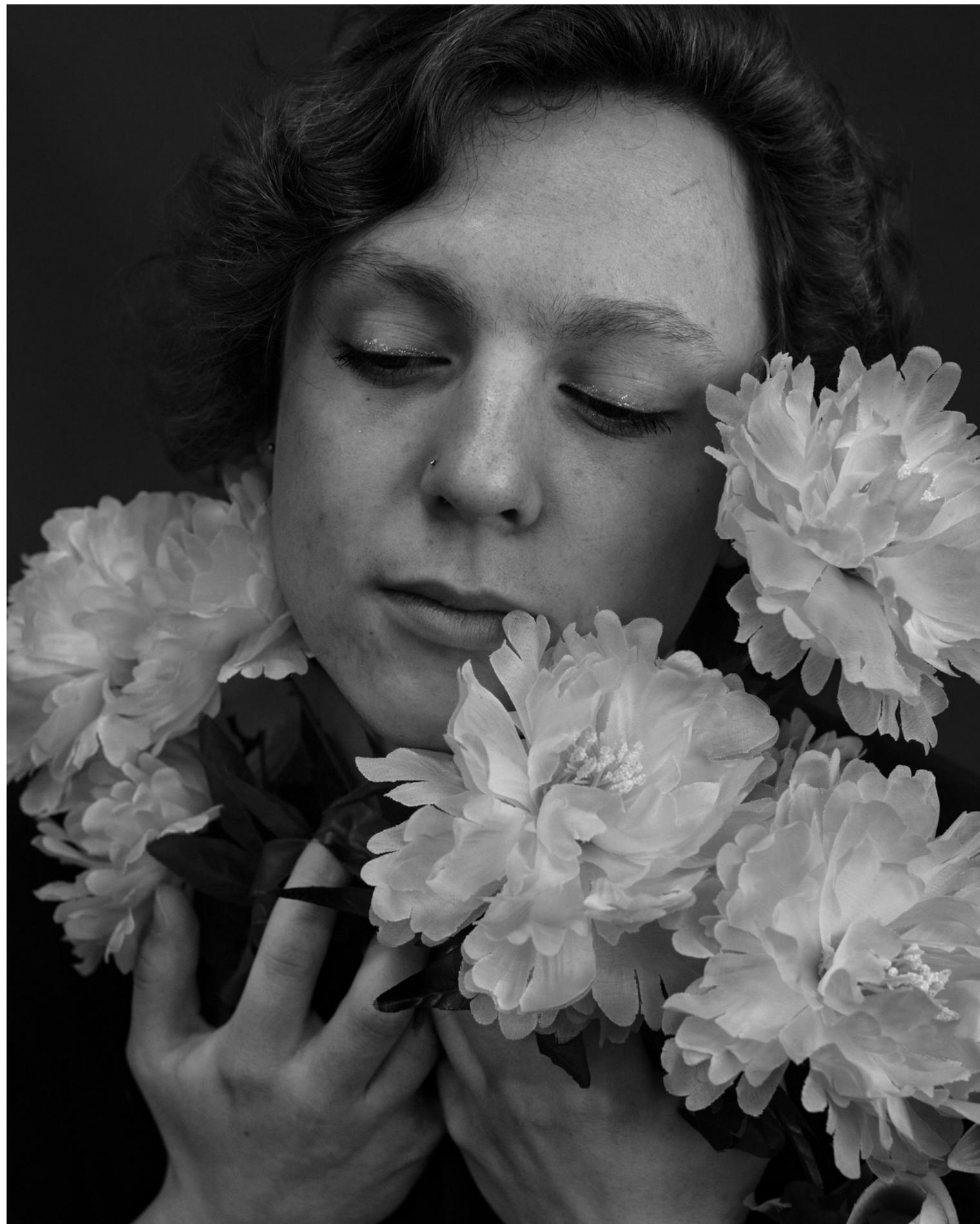
But my grace is this: when I do not know why I love you, then I know I am alive. There is no way out except in, so I amble through dark forests and into caves, where in the endless dark I hear the waterfalls sparkling over rocks into a further, fathomless night. I abdicate the light of day for the alphabet and the sweetness of the good devil. The devil does not steal our souls, he just shows us how to type on the typewriter, and relieve our souls from the burden of their solitude. But god is a propagandist who told his angels to tell us that the devil steals souls, and that he steals them with the twenty six mystical letters of the alphabet. So I sit before the typewriter in the dark, and in the endless recital of my fingers upon the keys I am angry at you for loving me, I wanted to hurt you for loving me because you looked at me and did not look away and I was frightened that when you looked at me you would see how I shimmer and if you looked close you would see that I only shimmer at the beginning and soon the shimmering fades and beneath the shimmering is what I do not give words to. And all the petals I crushed to make perfume, I am drunk on my perfumes but only when I am alone and in front of the typewriter. They sicken me because my beauty has brought me nothing and nonetheless I crush and crush, I crush up all the flowers I love and admire, and maybe when there is nothing left I will be loved, and if not I will be an object with hands full of crushed flowers. But when you looked at me I forgot how to make the perfume and so I suffocated because unless I crush them the flowers grow too great. I gave my kingdom to you, I let the crown tumble and said rule over me terrible prince, I want to be ruled by you alone. But you said you don't want to rule me, you want to love me. And I said I don't know how to love you except by saying my kingdom stands or falls for you, everything I have built here, the marble columns and wisteria-tangled grottos, and the endless rooms,

empty but for wind in lace curtains, they are for me until I remember you and then they are for you.

A miracle is when God cheats, because it makes the story sweeter.

Excerpt chosen by the author to accompany Elle Pérez's photograph Mae and flowers, 2015/2020. This text was included in a printed chapbook available to take away in the exhibition.

Elle Pérez
Mae and flowers, 2015/2020



ON NAMES

Charlotte Prodger

One of the great difficulties facing anyone who attempts to unravel the problems of the ancient world is that of names. The deities of antiquity have a very great number of names. Not only were they known by different names in different places, but they often had at least three different phases: old, middle-aged, and young, which were all known by different names in one place.

KOEUR, MA, BREE, HOEUR, UR, VER. The names of these goddesses—all of one syllable and all of them so similar as to have been unchanged since the stone age—sound like primal outpourings.¹

November 14th

Bought two t-shirts, a pair of jogging pants and some socks at JD Sports. The checkout girl asks if it's my son I'm buying for. I said no it's me. She didn't say much after that.

January 28th

I'm on a shift at the bar when I work as a DJ. I put on a long record and run to the toilet. There's a lot of people milling about in there chatting. One girl sees me in the queue and shouts "THERE'S A BOY IN THE GIRLS' TOILETS."

March 23rd

Helen in the bed next to me just asked if that was my daughter that was visiting last night, I said "no actually it's my girlfriend." She raised her hands, "don't have a problem with that, my son's gay."

August 24th

Bought a Caledonian MacBrayne cap in the shop on the ferry. The woman said "that looks good on you." Then I went to the toilet and as I was drying my hands a group of middle-aged women started coming through the door. The one at the front hesitated, backed out, then stepped back in again, "I thought I was in the wrong toilet there."

September 29th

The young guy at the optician's just asked me if that was my daughter I was in with yesterday. Flummoxed, I replied "no she's a friend." So now I've been closeted as well as being a cradle snatcher.

I told Isabel. She said that usually her and L get "are you twins?" and once L got "is this your son?"

I told Irene. She said V has been variously her mother, aunt, or brother.

Names themselves weren't codified as personal descriptors until the Domesday book. The idea behind taking a name appropriate to one's current circumstances was that identity isn't static. The concept of one's public and private self, separately or together, changes with age and experience (as do the definitions of public and private); and the name or the label of the identity package is an expression of that concept. The child is the mother to the adult, but the adult is not merely the child a bit later in time.²

Transcribed and excerpted from the artist's voiceover in BRIDGIT (2016).

Pages 62-65:
Charlotte Prodger, *BRIDGIT*, 2016 (video stills)

¹ Julian Cope, *The Modern Antiquarian: A Pre-Millennial Odyssey Through Megalithic Britain* (London: Thorsons, 1998)

² Allucquère Roseanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996)







EVERY DAY



ON POLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS

Marwa Arsanios

[It's] an interesting way of looking at history, through magazines, through ephemera. History as it's being written, by writers who wanted to craft it. *Al-Hilal* was a magazine for a mass readership, and it used a popular register to address these issues... A magazine forces you to offer an instant perspective on things. It's another pace of writing. As for the images, a lot of the covers that I use in *Becoming Jamila* were commissioned by famous illustrators, painters, and artists. They were artworks. Photography didn't appear in the magazine until 1962, and I like that earlier period, which expresses a utopian image of the nation. I'm fascinated by how grand national projects were represented before photography, how painting and illustration could serve as a space to imagine another world, although in a very naïve way....

I kept reading about Jamila, and I couldn't figure out who Jamila was. Of course, I knew the film, [Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, 1966,] but I hadn't connected it directly to her. I started going into the different representations of Jamila, and how she was represented in cinema, because there were many other films made about her. Also how she was represented in *Al-Hilal*—Nasser really used her as part of his propaganda project. She appeared on the cover several times, holding a gun, representing the courage of Algerian women. I thought that the idea of acting and of political representation were intimately related. What does it mean for one woman to represent a nation's women? There's a metaphor there of acting, of playing a role. That's where cinema came in....

I didn't make a film about Jamila; I made a film about a film about Jamila. *The Battle of Algiers* was a contemporary film, whereas if I were going to really make the film now, it would be a *film d'époque*, a period piece. That is not the place I want to go. I want to rethink the politics of the '50s and '60s in a very contemporary way... And yet at the same time, by reusing and re-abusing Jamila's image, I'm also possibly reproducing the image of the heroic fighter. Or I'm totally seduced by her, so I'm not actually producing a new politics. I'm always failing to find this new politics, but I still have to try.

Excerpted from a conversation with Jason Farago, "An Interview with Marwa Arsanios," in, Even, Issue 1, Summer 2015. <http://evenmagazine.com/marwa-arsanios/>



الله

يونيو ١٩٤٧
فسترون

الحزب الامام

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark, shoulder-length hair, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped polo shirt. She is looking slightly to her right with a neutral expression. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a palm tree and a framed picture on a wall. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders is visible, also out of focus.

I felt like a superfluous audience member
that had strayed inside the frame.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand with fingers spread, palm facing forward. The hand is positioned in the lower-left to center area of the frame. The background is a dense thicket of green leaves and brown, elongated seed pods, likely from a tree. The lighting is bright, suggesting an outdoor setting during the day. The text is overlaid on the lower right portion of the hand.

Did Nasser's government buy the rights
to Jamila's heroic image

ON PASSAGES IN TIME

Tamar Guimarães

I once heard Jean Pierre Gorin say that in the core of the narrative there is always something inscrutable, something that could not be said, and it is because of this “thing” that the narrator can speak, following the path of metaphor.

Stories are tools for processing and mastering events, be they traumatic or otherwise. They offer interpretive lexicons for the world we inhabit and a repertoire of the possible. Variations on a theme are so compelling because they propose shifts in interpretations and alternative outcomes for the past, present, and future.

At their most eloquent, stories can make visible the ebb and flow of human connections and the shifting character of our interdependent states of being. Yet they can also dull our perspectives and mold us to fit the parts (or lack thereof) assigned to “people like us.”

I usually approach the central themes and figures of my narratives ambiguously: they might be somewhat veiled, or appear backstage rather than center, yet that doesn’t mean they are not at the center of the narrative.

When I made *The Rehearsal*, I worked again with several actors whom I’d worked with for a film eight years before, and it was essential for the narrative that their positions on the stage changed. People who appeared centrally in the earlier film appeared only marginally in the later one, and vice versa.

The actress Isabél Zuaa, the writer Suely Rolnik, and the film historian Pedro Guimarães all appeared in *Canoas*, a film I shot in 2010. And as much had changed in Brazil in the eight years between *Canoas* and *The Rehearsal*, these actors and non-actors occupied different positions in the narrative, like different positions on a chessboard. In *Canoas*, Zuaa played one of the servants at an upper-middle-class house party and in *The Rehearsal*, she was a director, attempting to stage *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas* at an art institution. Zuaa was thematically a central figure in *Canoas*, but not quite in the same way as in *The Rehearsal*, because *Canoas* was multicentered.

The reappearances and shifts in stage positions were essential to *The Rehearsal* because they allowed the film to ask whether the socio-political changes of the intervening years were real, or only a semblance of sociopolitical transformations. *The Rehearsal* is a film about the passage of time, short-lived revolutionary actions, institutional memory, and race and gender relations in Brazil.

Machado de Assis—the Black writer and author of the novel that Isa attempts to stage in *The Rehearsal*—had a clear perspective on the passage of time and sociopolitical reform in Brazil in the late nineteenth century. In 1874, Machado de Assis joined the ministry of agriculture and, for the next thirty-five years, worked in a department responsible for two issues: firstly slavery—he had to ensure that the so-called “free-womb law,” which was adopted on September 28, 1871, ruling that newborn children of slaves should be free at birth, was followed. His other task was land policy. The historian Sidney Chalhoub says that these “daily battles, many of which Machado lost, ended up having great influence on how he represented the seigniorial class of that society in his writing. He wrote about a society that had created mechanisms to maintain over time its strategies of exclusion and privilege... however much it had changed; it changed and remained the same.”

Pages 71-73:
Tamar Guimarães, *O Ensaio* | *The Rehearsal*, 2018 (video stills)





But why replace the mistakes of the past
with the opinions of today



WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Marwa Arsanios

Have you ever killed a bear? or Becoming Jamila, 2013-2014; HD video, (26 min, 19 sec); Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier, Paris
Pages 2, 27, 67-69

In this protean portrait of the Algerian freedom fighter Jamila Bouhired, the artist steps forward as an ambivalent narrator who unravels her fascination with this radical figure. Arsanios draws out the many ways Bouhired's image has been used—from her representation in the 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers* to her assimilation by ideological state propaganda as an anti-colonialist symbol. As the video unfolds, this leads to reflections on the history of marginalized feminist projects and leftist political struggles.

Bethany Collins

The Odyssey: 2001 / 2017, 2020; Graphite and toner on Somerset paper; Courtesy of the artist and PATRON, Chicago
Pages 1, 10, 12, 34-35

This pair of drawings replicates the same page from two different translations of *The Odyssey*, published in 2000 and 2017, respectively. The more recent of the two is by Emily Wilson—the first woman to translate *The Odyssey* into English—whose interpretation of Homer's text underlines Odysseus's interiority and quietly works against longstanding biases found in past translations and past times. Collins recreates the printed pages by hand, as large graphite drawings, before rubbing away the text to leave a single phrase behind.

Raven Chacon

American Ledger, no. 3, 2020; Polyester flag and newsprint broadsheets; Courtesy of the artist
Pages 10, 12-13, 36-38

In an ongoing series of original musical compositions, *American Ledger*, Raven Chacon responds to the nation's contested history and the places where each work is commissioned, in this case Chicago. Here, he dedicates a new musical score—taking the form of a large flag—and a printed newspaper to Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), a prominent journalist, suffragist, and anti-lynching activist. The newspaper includes instructions for performing the score; it also bridges past and present, as some of Wells's writing from a century ago appears alongside a list of police murders in 2020.

Tamar Guimarães

O Ensaio | The Rehearsal, 2018; HD video, (51 min, 29 sec); Courtesy of the artist, FortesD'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro; and Dan Gunn, London
Pages 26, 71-73, 79

O Ensaio | The Rehearsal stages a dramatic adaptation of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*, a satirical 19th-century novel by Machado de Assis that critiqued Brazilian society. At the center of the film is a woman named Isa, who directs the play and faces difficulties from various people as they respond to her gender, race, youth, or some combination of the three. The film was partially shot at São Paulo's Ibirapuera pavilion, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, and features professional and nonprofessional actors.

Kapwani Kiwanga

Repository, 2020; Weaving, glass; Tapestry production: John Paul Morabito; Glass production: Ignite Glass Studios; Courtesy of the artist
Pages 22, 29, 47-50

This newly commissioned tapestry contains small grains of rice made of ghostly transparent glass that are tucked within the patterned weaving. Kiwanga was inspired to develop this work after researching the introduction of rice into the US and Suriname via the slave trade, and stories about women enslaved in West Africa who concealed grains of rice in their hair or their clothes in order to become self-sufficient once they escaped. As Kiwanga says, "This hidden rice becomes an invisible seed bank of sorts for possible future communities."

Huong Ngô

It was her handwriting that gave her away, 2020; Invisible ink on paper, Framed relief prints with graphite, light box with printed dura trans, custom teak vitrine, laser cut onion-skin paper, books, Xerox with graphite; Courtesy of the artist
Pages 5, 13, 16, 18-19, 43-46, 78

This installation, commissioned for *Nine Lives*, continues a body of work that Ngô is developing around Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai, a woman celebrated for her role in Vietnam's anticolonial movement even as she remains a spectral presence in historical records. Traces

of Minh Khai appear in archives in Vietnam, including slivers of her life story that crop up within once-secret bureaucratic letters. Ngo also presents works that use espionage techniques such as invisible ink, raising the question of what remains unknown.

Aliza Nisenbaum

Kayhan Reading the New York Times (Resistance Begins at Home), 2017; Oil on linen; Collection of Holly and Albert Baril, Los Angeles
Pages 9, 13, 15, 39-40

Aliza Nisenbaum spends hours with the subject of each of her portraits, painting them from life, often as they sit in their living rooms. Many of the people she paints are immigrants to the US, and Nisenbaum notes that "to pay attention to someone can be a political act." In this painting of Kayhan, a writer who leads theater workshops with immigrants, recent newspapers cover the floor, bringing the specter of outside events into the more private sphere of her home.

Alison O'Daniel

The Tuba Thieves: The Drums, 2013-ongoing; Written, directed, edited by Alison O'Daniel. Starring Nyke Prince; Produced by Rachel Nederveld, Cinematography by Judy Phu; 5-channel HD video (looped), acoustic underlayment; Courtesy of the artist
Pages 16, 18, 24, 54-58

This video installation, configured specifically for its site in the exhibition, features six short videos that play on five screens in varying combinations, creating a shifting, almost musical, visual composition. Throughout, the camera follows Nyke Prince, a deaf drummer in Los Angeles, alone in her studio, setting up her kit, decorating, texting or video chatting with friends. This series of filmic vignettes comprise one chapter from *The Tuba Thieves*, a larger ongoing film that O'Daniel is making episodically with various collaborators.

Toyin Ojih Odutola

In the Drawing Room, 2018; Pastel, charcoal and pencil on paper; Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
Pages 7, 9, 32-33

This portrait is from a series of drawings depicting members of a fictional aristocratic Nigerian family. Through these figures Odutola

imagines a world, without the destructive histories of colonialism and slavery. (In an earlier exhibition, the artist signed the press release as "Deputy Secretary of the Amara Palace," taking on the role of family functionary.) For *Nine Lives*, Ojih Odutola has decided to show a single drawing, offering an intimate glimpse of one character as the larger context momentarily recedes.

Elle Pérez

Mae and flowers, 2015/2020; Digital gelatin silver print; Courtesy of the artist and Canal 47, New York
Pages 25, 60

Mae (three days after), 2019; Archival pigment print; Collection of Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins
Pages 22, 52

Mae at Riis, 2020; Archival pigment print; Courtesy of the artist and Canal 47, New York
Pages 16, 42

Elle Pérez's three photographs in *Nine Lives* feature one person, Maisie Mattia, at different points in her life: the first portrait was taken in 2015, the second in 2019, and the latest from this August. This trio is accompanied by a group of writings by Mattia herself. Rather than impose a linear trajectory upon these portraits, both Mattia and Pérez have said they are interested in what remains constant between the images, which are installed apart from one another like "islands in time."

Charlotte Prodger

BRIDGIT, 2016; HD video (32 min); Courtesy the artist, Hollybush Gardens, London, and Koppe Astner, Glasgow
Pages 28, 62-65

Prodger's video *BRIDGIT* was entirely shot on an iPhone, creating a lyric essay-film that moves across interior and exterior landscapes. In her voice-over, Prodger talks about her own experience within different social contexts, including the medical system in the UK, but the work has a much broader view of time that includes echoes of prehistory. It takes its title, *BRIDGIT*, from the eponymous Neolithic deity, who also went by other many names depending on her life stage and point in time.

BIOGRAPHIES

Marwa Arsanios (b. 1978, Washington DC) is a Beirut-based artist, filmmaker and researcher who reconsiders politics of the mid-twentieth century from a contemporary perspective, with a particular focus on gender relations, urbanism, and industrialization. She approaches research collaboratively and seeks to work across disciplines.

Bethany Collins (b.1984, Montgomery, AL) is a Chicago-based multidisciplinary artist whose conceptually driven work is fueled by a critical exploration of how race and language interact. Using a wide variety of materials and methods, she has looked incisively at an equally varied array of textual sources, including nineteenth-century ads, patriotic hymns, and southern literary journals. In an ongoing series, she works with different translations of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* as the basis for graphite drawings.

Raven Chacon (b. 1977, Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation) is a composer, performer and installation artist based in Albuquerque. As a solo artist, collaborator, or with the group Postcommodity, Chacon has exhibited or performed at a wide range of museums and festivals. Every year, he teaches twenty students to write string quartets for the Native American Composer Apprenticeship Project (NACAP).

Tamar Guimarães (b. 1967, Belo Horizonte, Brazil) has created a body of work in video, sound, and installation that uses found and manufactured elements to question dominant histories of modernism. She manipulates appropriated imagery with an intensity that mimics sociological method and questions the staging of history, revisiting neglected figures and events in order to elucidate current social and political issues.

Kayhan Irani (b. Bombay (now Mumbai)) is an Emmy-award winning writer, a performer, and a Theater of the Oppressed trainer. She creates art to build community, offer spaces for healing, and to engage audiences in social justice issues. Her one-woman show, *We've Come Undone*, toured internationally, telling stories of Arab, South Asian, and Muslim-American women in the wake of 9/11.

Kapwani Kiwanga (b. 1978, Hamilton, Canada) creates work that traces the pervasive impact of power asymmetries by placing historic narratives

in dialogue with contemporary realities and tomorrow's possibilities. Her research-driven work is instigated by marginalized or forgotten histories, and articulated in a range of materials and mediums including sculpture, installation, photography, video, and performance. She lives and works in Paris.

Karsten Lund (b. 1981, Northfield, MN) is Curator at the Renaissance Society and co-curator of *Nine Lives*. At the Ren he has organized solo exhibitions with David Maljkovic, LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Haig Aivazian, as well as other group exhibitions, and has been lead curator for *Intermissions*, an ongoing biannual performance program that he helped initiated in 2017.

Maisie Mattia (b. Hong Kong) grew up in Texas and lives in New York City. They've been working on a collection called *Unsex Me Here*. Two of its stories have been published to date—most recently “Via Crucis,” in *Zoetrope*. As a collaboration for *Nine Lives*, Mattia selected excerpts from three unpublished stories to accompany three portraits taken by Elle Pérez. These texts were offered as chapbook in the exhibition, available for visitors to take away, and also appear in this catalogue.

Huong Ngô (b. 1979, Hong Kong) works between France and Vietnam, and is based in Chicago. Having grown up as a refugee in the American South, she engages histories of colonialism and migration, particularly in relationship to language, structures of power, and ideologies. The body, its absence and its traces are strongly present in her work, which often asks how we might make visible the process of our own subject formation.

Aliza Nisenbaum (b. 1977, Mexico City) makes paintings that are intimate exchanges between herself and her subjects, whether they are portraying undocumented immigrants, healthcare providers, or other creative workers. Giving shape to this practice, Nisenbaum has often worked with diverse communities in the US and the UK and has exhibited the resulting portraits at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Whitney Biennial, and Tate Liverpool.

Alison O'Daniel (b. 1979, Miami, FL) is a Los Angeles-based artist who combines film, performance, sculpture, and installation as a call-and-response between mediums. O'Daniel

collaborates with hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing composers, performers, athletes, and musicians in order to highlight the loss or re-creation of information as it passes through various channels, and to build a visual, aural, and haptic vocabulary as a means to tell stories inspired by events that are both historic and quotidian.

Toyin Ojih Odutola (b. 1985, Ife, Nigeria) is a New York-based artist best known for her multimedia drawings and works on paper, which explore the malleability of identity and the possibilities in visual storytelling. Her work is inspired by both art history and popular culture, as well as her own personal history—being born in Nigeria and then moving as a child to America where she was raised in Alabama.

Elle Pérez (b. 1989, Bronx, NY) lives in Brooklyn, New York. Since receiving their MFA from Yale School of Art in 2015, Pérez has worked primarily in photography, depicting the intimate moments, emotional exchanges, and visceral details of their subjects and landscapes. Imbued with desire and a profound sense of care for their subjects, the photographs depict the traces of queer experiences and reflect the ever-changing nature of identity.

Caroline Picard (b. 1980, Tokyo) is a writer and curator currently based in New Mexico, and co-curator of *Nine Lives*. She is the Executive Director of the Green Lantern Press—a nonprofit publisher and art producer in operation since 2005. From 2013 to 2015, she co-directed Sector 2337 in Chicago, a contemporary art and performance space where she organized numerous solo and group exhibitions, such as *The New New Corpse* and *Imperceptibly and Slowly Opening*.

Charlotte Prodger (b. 1974, Bournemouth, UK) is a Glasgow-based artist who works with moving image, printed image, sculpture, and writing, exploring the intertextual relationships between each of these materials. Prodger's installations and performances look at what happens to speech—and the self, for which it is a conduit—as it metamorphoses through time, space and technological systems.

Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi (b. 1983, Westlake Village, CA) is an Iranian-American writer based in Chicago and a professor at Notre Dame University, in South Bend, Indiana. She is

the author of *Fra Keeler*, (Dorothy, a publishing project, 2012) and *Call Me Zebra* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018) which won the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction the John Gardner Award, among others. Her novel *Savage Tongues* was published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2021.



Published on the occasion of the exhibition:

Nine Lives

The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago

September 12–November 15, 2020

Curated by Karsten Lund and Caroline Picard

Editors: Karsten Lund and Caroline Picard

Publication Director: Karen Reimer

Installation photographs: Useful Art Services

ISBN: 978-0-941548-82-3

All Renaissance Society publications are made possible
by the Mansueto Foundation Publications Program.

© 2021 The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago

All rights reserved. No part of the contents of this book
may be reproduced without the written permission of
the publisher.

All photographs of artworks are copyright of the artist.
All installation photographs are copyright of The Renaissance
Society at the University of Chicago.

THE
RENAISSANCE
SOCIETY

Page 1: Bethany Collins, *The Odyssey: 2001 / 2017*, 2020 (detail)

Page 2: Marwa Arsanios, *Have you ever killed a bear? or Becoming Jamila*, 2013–2014, (video still)

Page 78: Huong Ngô, *It was her handwriting that gave her away*, 2020 (detail)

Page 79: Tamar Guimarães, *O Ensaio | The Rehearsal*, 2018 (video still)